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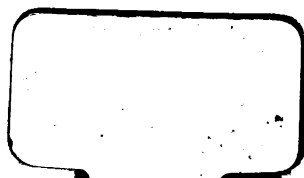




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IS HE THE MAN?

IS HE THE MAN?

A Novel.

BY

W. CLARK RUSSELL,

AUTHOR OF

"JOHN HOLDSWORTH: CHIEF MATE," "JILTED," ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.



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IS HE THE MAN ?

THE COLONEL'S STORY.

I.

NOT to diminish the apparent improbability of this narrative, but to prove my own veracity in my relation of the share I took in it, I have called upon one of the actors to furnish me with her own experiences of what she saw and did. By her respectable testimony, if I do not persuade others, I may at least convince myself that the past, to which I recur, is not the distempered dream which, since I became old and infirm, I have been often disposed to consider it.

For the misfortunes that befel me and my child I have myself only to blame. I was guilty of two deplorable errors, both arising from a want of moral strength and

courage. But the very sensibility which was at the root of the misfortunes I have had to lament, should supply a sufficient guarantee that my sufferings have abundantly expiated my irremediable mistakes.

Let this brief avowal suffice.

In the summer of the year 18— my daughter Phœbe having recovered from a slight indisposition, I was advised by Dr. Redcliff to remove her for a few weeks to the seaside ; and chose Broadstairs, in those days a town little troubled by visitors. I hired some rooms in the Albion Hotel, and had soon the gratification of witnessing a great improvement in my daughter's health. She regained her old looks, her old vivacity of spirits, and within a fortnight of our arrival was strong enough to take an oar in a boat. Rowing soon became her favourite pastime, and she grew before long so expert at the oars as to be able to row a boat by herself. I mention this trivial matter to prepare the way for the circumstance I shall presently relate.

Phœbe was then twenty years old: in many respects resembling her mother whom I had lost by death but three years before.

She was dark, with a small, handsome, decided face; her hair was black and abundant, and she wore it with much grace, anticipating a later fashion: that is, in plaited coils, a mode that admirably suited the Greek cast of her features. Her nose was straight, her eyebrows narrow but very black, and so arched as to give her face, in repose, a prevailing expression of pretty surprise. Her mouth was small, the underlip full, her complexion colourless, but delicate and healthy; her forehead low and square, and her chin and throat beautiful in their outlines. Her height was above the middle stature; but she wore her dresses long, and suggested a more commanding presence when she walked than she possessed. Her character we shall gather as we progress.

Broadstairs fits the white cliff on which it stands with a snug air of design, and from the sea satisfies the eye with an aspect of rough and sober completeness. The rude, well-tarred pier, stumpy and solid, with the transparent breakers rattling the shingle under the creviced flooring, is a finishing detail of which the omission would leave a

blank in the salt sentiment of the place. A simplicity strangely primitive and strictly maritime seems somehow to keep the town fresh as the breezes which sweep through its little ancient archway and rattle the windows of the cheery Frigate Inn; and this characteristic defies the eliminating magic of the trowel, for the sense of it is as strong to-day as it was years ago; when much overgrown matter had no being, and the delightful traditions of the smugglers—the dark nights, the subtle lugger, the mystified coastguard—lay all unencumbered to tax-hating imaginations by the bricks and mortar which now vex and in some measure defy them.

Phœbe did ample justice to the place by taking the best pleasure it offered. My faith was pinned to the dry land. The sands brought me to as close an acquaintance with the sea as I cared about; and there, hard by the cliff, I would sit, book in hand, a pocket-telescope by my side, idly speculating on the missions of the ships that went and came, or watching the little children paddling bare-legged in the sea, while Phœbe rowed herself from point to point in

a boat, alone, feathering her oars like any young waterman, and often exciting the comments of loungers who, like myself, could find no easier diversion than staring.

One morning I was at the end of the little pier, sheltered from the sun by an awning. The sea was glassy, and crept as softly as the touch of a blind man's fingers, up and down the beach, and around the projecting rocks near the pier. Great clouds, glorious to behold, white as wool with an edging of silver, and darkening their extremities to the richest cream-colour when they drew away from the sun, hung over the polished deep. The sunshine made the little bay that gapes before the town festive with light, spangling the dry white sand near the cliffs, and deepening the hue of the brown-ribbed shore over which the water had washed, and giving relief to the spots of colour lent to the scene by the apparel of the women and children on the beach by the vivid brightening of the chalk cliffs.

Phœbe was rowing as usual in one of the wherries belonging to the place. She had gone some distance in an easterly direction and was now returning with a fair tide.

She passed the pier at a distance of a hundred yards, and it was a sight worthy of any man's admiration to remark the wonderfully graceful inclination of her form, her finely modelled bust, as she brought her firm, small white hands up to it, her head thrown back, protected by a broad-brimmed straw hat, the feather of which streamed to the air with the motion of the boat. The keen stem of the wherry chipped the blue water into a spout of foam, and the oars flashed.

The great, stooping clouds overhead, the background of many-shadowed water, speckled with white sails, and this near boat, with its faultless figure of a girl impelling it forward, made a picture worth converting into a permanent memory.

"What a charming woman! How admirably she rows! Pray, sir, can you tell me who she is?" exclaimed a voice at my side.

I turned and saw a young man staring at the boat through a field-glass.

"She is my daughter," I answered.

"I really beg your pardon," he said, covering his embarrassment with a well-

bred bow and a pleasant smile. "I trust you will consider my question as a piece of mental admiration unconsciously expressed aloud rather than as a direct interrogatory."

"Then," said I, "I must esteem myself the more flattered. My daughter certainly does use her oars dexterously, but I wish she would take a boatman with her when she goes on the water."

"I think she would act wisely in doing so. You will allow me to repeat my apology for my heedless question."

He raised his hat and walked away. He could have done no more nor less. What intrusion there was had been on his side; he had acted properly in withdrawing, and his perception of fitness pleased me, and I thought showed him a gentleman. By such small circumstances are we prejudiced in life. I met him again in the afternoon, when I was with Phœbe. He took no notice of either of us; but I watched him with a friendly eye, and when, my memory having been freshened by the sight of him, I had mentioned the incident of the morning to my daughter, I noticed that she looked in the direction where he had come to a

stand by the rail upon the cliff, and turned her eyes askant upon me with a half-smile of gratification in them.

A few days after this, I was seated at the window of my sitting-room in the hotel, killing the hour before dinner with a novel. The afternoon was very sultry ; few persons were to be seen ; the sun poured upon the chalk, and filled the air to a height of some feet with a haze, through which objects were magnified and distorted, as though watched through a medium of steam. Phoebe as usual was rowing, but the hotel stood back, and the pier and the sea about it were hidden from me by the cliffs.

Interested as I was by my book, I was presently sensible of a gathering and ominous stillness in the air, coupled with an increase of heat, of which the effect upon the skin was to make it clammy. Overhead, and on either side of me, the sky was blue, though with a livid rather than an azure tint upon it. A distant grumbling like the rolling of a heavy van despatched me to the parade, to view the gathering storm, which I knew could not be very far off. It was stretched right behind the hotel from

north to south—a long, scowling bank of cloud, straight as a line, as though ruled off upon the sky, and black as midnight, with the sun's rays upon it.

Where was Phœbe? I ran to the edge of the cliff, but could see no boat. I thence concluded that she had landed, and walked quickly towards the pier, thinking I should meet her. I asked two boatmen, one of whom was looking through a glass in the direction of the sea, if my daughter had come ashore.

"There she is yonder," he answered.

I shaded my eyes with my hand, but my sight being bad could see nothing.

"Where? where?" I exclaimed, hurriedly.

He gave me the glass, and levelling it at the spot he indicated, I saw, but very imperfectly, two boats, one about a quarter of a mile from the other; but I could not make out either of their occupants.

"Good heavens!" I cried, "do you mean to say my daughter is in one of those boats alone?"

"Ay," answered one of the men, "that's her."

"But what is she doing out there?"

kept my eyes fixed upon the point of the water whence I expected the boats to emerge, and then I saw them. Very slowly they advanced ; a strong tide and a strong wind and a jumping sea were against them. Not until they were within half a mile of the pier could I clearly discern them, and then I observed that there were three boats, and that the first boat, which towed the others, contained four rowers. These rowers were my daughter, the boatmen, and a stranger, whose face, until the boats were within a stone's throw of the pier, I could not see ; but on his looking around, presently, I recognised in him the person who had addressed me on the pier a few days before.

By this time the storm had entirely cleared away in the east, but had left behind it many clouds of long attenuated shapes, which chased the sky with torn limbs and here and there poured a quick shower of rain upon the sea. The hindermost wherry, as the boats hauled alongside, shipped enough water on a sudden to log her and set the oars afloat. My daughter called a cheery greeting to me, but I had been made peevish by anxiety and suspense, and returned no

answer, merely posting myself at the head of the steps up which she presently came.

"I hope," I exclaimed warmly, pulling out a half sovereign and handing it to the man who had helped her up the steps, "you have received a lesson that will put an end to your going on the water alone. You have frightened me out of my wits."

"I am very sorry, papa," she answered, and if she had felt any fear all trace of it was gone. Her face was flushed with the exertion of rowing, and her eyes sparkled like the water where the sunshine shone on it. "I'll take care to profit by the lesson. I mistook the tide and rowed out, thinking that by the time I was tired the current would bring me back. Will you thank the gentleman," she whispered, motioning with her head towards the boat where the young fellow was standing whilst he put on his coat, "for coming to my assistance? I really *might* have been lost but for him."

"Why," I exclaimed, "I thought he had been in the same pickle, and had got the men I sent to you to tow him in."

He was now coming up the steps, and Phoebe could enter into no further explana-

tions, so I stepped up to him and extending my hand said, "My daughter tells me you rowed to her help seeing the plight she was in. Allow me to thank you cordially for your service."

"Indeed, I am only too happy to have been of use to her," he answered, taking my proffered hand. "I saw that if she drifted out much further she would soon need help, if she did not actually want it then; so I jumped into a boat and rowed out to her. These wherries are rather too heavy for a lady to row against a current."

"They are indeed," exclaimed Phœbe, speaking with a heightened colour and a bright smile. "My courage was failing me fast, and I can't describe the joy I felt when I saw your boat coming towards me."

"To think," I cried, turning angrily towards the boatmen who were baling out the wherry, "that those rascals should require a bribe of ten shillings to save a human life!"

"We couldn't have done without them," said the stranger. "It was as much as the four of us could do to reach the land, and this lady pulled as strong an oar as any of us."

He here raised his hat and was going, but I exclaimed, "I have not half expressed to you the gratitude I feel. We are returning to dinner, and your company will give us great pleasure."

He thanked me in a hesitating manner, glanced at Phœbe, and accepted my invitation. I gave him my card and took his, on which I read the name Mr. Saville Ransome, and then we walked in the direction of the hotel.

I was naturally profuse in my thanks, for I really considered he had acted with great consideration and courage in hastening to Phœbe's assistance, and his pleasant evasion of the topic pleased me as an illustration of modesty. He mentioned that he was in lodgings in the High Street, and that he had been in Broadstairs since the previous Wednesday, and that he purposed stopping another month in the town. He said that he was very fond of travelling.

"I sometimes," he exclaimed, laughing and addressing Phœbe, "terrify my mother by quitting her house without saying a word. She is, perhaps, used to this habit now. I relish unexpected things, and one

of my whims is to act in such a manner as to prove myself ignorant of my own motives. After all, Miss Kilmain, novelty is the salt of life. To make up one's mind to do a thing is to extract all the pleasure of achievement out of it."

"That must depend," said I, smiling at the oddness of the remark, "on the thing you mean to do."

"If you act as you say, then you are governed by impulse," said Phœbe.

"And so I am."

"To judge by the illustration you have given us just now of the quality of your impulses, you have every reason to be proud of their control," said I.

We had now reached the hotel, and I led the way upstairs. The dinner was overcooked of course. It was half past six, and we were to have dined at half past five. However, I had recovered my temper by this time, and found nothing to be aggrieved with in the fault that was entirely of our own contriving. The danger Phœbe had escaped, instead of silencing and making her reflective as, perhaps, it should have done, had raised her spirits, while the pre-

sence of Mr. Ransome gave a peculiar lightness and grace to her words and laughter, and imbued her with enough of self-consciousness to render her manner quite piquant.

As for Mr. Ransome, he was a good-looking young man whom I had set down roughly as about thirty years old. The sea-side sun had burnt his face, and the brown became him. It was my belief then, as it is now, that he had Indian blood in him, for the irids of his eyes were of the dusky hue that spreads like a stain upon the whites, and the whole cast of his face was Eastern—the nose aquiline, the forehead high at the temples, the jawbones long, the complexion sallow, the under-lip full, and so moulded as to convey in repose the suggestion of a slight sneer. He wore a moustache which left a space of clear flesh under the nose ; his ears were small, and lay flat against his head ; his hair was close-cropped at the back, and brushed up, without a parting, over his forehead. He was a trifle above the average height, but looked smaller than he was owing to the slimness of his shape. His hands and feet were small almost to deformity ; he held

himself erect as a ramrod, and had a trick of quick, furtive glancing, and appeared to busy himself with details which most persons would overlook.

The mention of this last characteristic hints roughly at a peculiarity of manner which, because of the subtlety of its action, is scarcely to be described. It was an effect produced by quick, nervous movements of the body, sharp impulsive glances, abrupt exhibitions of energy taking an almost passionate character from contrast with the trivial occasions which exercised them, a restlessness of his hands and legs, and a habit of beginning a sentence in a clear, decided voice, which would falter and die away, so to speak, in a singular sing-song cadence, as though his meaning evaporated before he could fairly pin it down with a full stop; but no description of this manner and the impression it produced on me could submit its real character and influence to your mind.

His remarks often bordered on the eccentric, and were yet qualified again by much good sense and a clear thread of shrewdness that bound them together and kept them

logical by making them consistent. Phœbe was much amused by his conversation. He had started with some show of reserve, but broke through it after a while, and chatted freely. But despite his oddities, I was satisfied that he was a gentleman. His breeding showed itself in numberless little touches, and in a marked degree in his courteous deference to Phœbe.

I was by no means ill-pleased at the prospect of finding an agreeable acquaintance in this gentleman during the remainder of my stay at Broadstairs. Having lived much abroad in my youth, and mixed largely with men, I had little of the reserve or suspicion that keeps people asunder among us. Indeed, if the army fails to cosmopolitanize a man there is no hope for him. I had felt the want of a companion now and again—some one to smoke a cigar with, to exchange remarks with on current newspaper topics, to kill the tedium of the time when Phœbe was upon the water, or after she had gone to bed.

I was in those days a middle-aged gentleman, and could hardly lack penetration enough to protect me from a mere mimic of

the graces of breeding had Mr. Ransome been such a one. His behaviour during the first evening of our acquaintance thoroughly satisfied my fastidiousness on that point, and before I had sat with him an hour, I felt that whatever his antecedents might be he was a man I should be safe in knowing and in allowing Phœbe to know whilst we remained in Broadstairs, after which it was hardly probable we should meet him again.

I went with him on the balcony after dinner. Phœbe joined us and spoke of her adventure that afternoon.

"I shall never go in a boat again," she said; "I was much more frightened than I seemed, Mr. Ransome."

"You were nervous, indeed, as the most heroic person in the world would be under such conditions, but your courage could not have been very far off, for you soon recovered it."

"How did you manage?" I asked.

"On reaching Miss Kilmain's boat," he replied, "I got into it and attached my own boat to the stern. I then seized the oars and began to row towards Broadstairs, but I do not suppose that I did more than keep

the boat steady against the current. When the other boat arrived Miss Kilmain and I scrambled into her and made up four oars and in this trim reached home."

I caught Phcebe watching him with a pair of very bright smiling eyes as he spoke; but, happening to meet mine, her gaze fell, and there was an air about her for a brief moment of a sudden little confusion. I paid no attention to this, nor indeed to various other trifling signs with which she illustrated the pleasure she received from Mr. Ransome's company. We had seen almost nothing of society since my wife died, and it was very natural that Phcebe, in the presence of a good-looking young gentleman who had done her a very great service and treated her with thoroughbred courtesy, should be a little more ingenuous in her behaviour than she would have been had she been disciplined by the custom of meeting young men in ball-rooms many nights in the year, as would probably have been her fortune had her mother been spared to me.

It might have been, perhaps, a sensitiveness that made him feel the insufficiency of his introduction to us, which set him talking

about his mother and relating some particulars of his past. He said that he was afraid he had astonished me by the queer account he had given of his migratory habits.

"Not at all," I answered; "you converted your habits into philosophic actions by the explanation of your reasons for seeking novelty. The first ambition of every young man should be to travel. He can hardly ever hope to think rightly until he has seen the world."

"I am afraid," he exclaimed, laughing, "that I can hardly dignify my excursions by calling them travels. I live at Guildford—at least my mother has a house there. Do you know Guildford, Miss Kilmain?"

"No."

"There is some charming scenery in the neighbourhood. My mother has lived there nearly all her life. She inherited a little—a very little estate just outside the town, from her father, who, by the way," he said, turning to me, "served many years in India—General Shadwell."

"I know the name well," I replied.

"Was not he a brother of Lord Carnmore?"

"Yes, the younger brother of a well-entailed family, who had literally to carve his fortune with his sword. My mother is sometimes a little fretful with me for my mysterious disappearances," he continued, addressing Phœbe: "but I *cannot* settle. I have been a week at Broadstairs, I talk of stopping here another month, and probably after having persuaded myself into a conviction that I shall serve out my allotted time, will one morning start away for Wales or Scotland. But then I mustn't allow myself to think of this as a possible intention or I shall defeat all the pleasure of impulse."

He shook his head with a gravity which I thought affected, conceiving that he spoke really in fun.

The sun was now setting, there was a crimson haze in the air which made the sea a violet colour, and the clouds as they whirled across the sky from the hazy south, had an edging of brilliant gold at their side. I caught myself watching Mr. Ransome, and thinking him, by this flattering

purple light, much handsomer than he had at first struck me. There was something that particularly pleased me in the manliness of his face and upright figure; his eyes, though they wanted fire, were filled with a suggestion of active sensibility, which however might be due rather to the heavy blackness of the irids than to the expressions which filled them. But still there was a prevailing oddness in his manner, vehicled by his voice and gestures and seldom to be gathered from his bare words, which defeated the theories of him I now and again formed as we continued chatting.

The wind fell at sundown, and a calm delicious night came on with a bright moon, which steeped a broad space of silver in the sea and made the land and water holy. We kept our places on the balcony until ten o'clock, when Mr. Ransome rose and wished us good night. I shook hands very warmly with him on parting at the door of the hotel, and assured him that I should be at all times glad to see him both at Broadstairs and at Gardenhurst, where my house was. He thanked me for my hospitality, and implying a neat compliment

both to myself and Phœbe in a well-turned reference to his and her adventure, raised his hat and walked away.

I returned to Phœbe whom I found yawning on the sofa.

"Well, my dear, what do you think of our new acquaintance?" I asked.

"I am almost too sleepy to think," she replied; "but—well, he is a very nice young fellow, is not he?"

"He is gentlemanly."

"Very."

"I can't quite make out that manner of his. I should put it down to nervousness were it not that he is *not* nervous."

"What manner, papa?"

"Why, his odd, quick gestures, and his way of looking at one, and then again his die-away voice when he begins a sentence with energy and falls into a dream before he reaches the end of it."

"I didn't notice this."

"Not his restlessness?"

"He has a habit of twitching his hands a little when he speaks," she answered; "but there is nothing in that."

"That only shows what different im-

pressions the same man will produce on different people," said I, laughing. "He appears to me to be a bundle of nerves, partially controlled by earnestness which now and again suffers from remissions, and then off go his hands and feet. Has not he Indian blood in him, Phœbe?"

"He is too handsome for an Indian, isn't he?" she replied, with a soft laugh, leaving the sofa and standing at the window with her eyes on the bright moonlight on the water. "Fancy," she continued, pointing to the sea, where it lay black against the reflection of the silver light, "fancy my having been alone in a boat out there! Had he not come to me where should I be now? Miles and miles away, perhaps, if the boat had not sunk when the wind rose. Imagine my loneliness when the night fell, and when I should see vessels passing me at a distance like phantom ships in the moonlight, too far off to hear my cries! I must think of something else," she exclaimed, with a shudder, leaving the window, "or I shall not be able to sleep."

Her words seemed to rebuke the criticism I had passed on the man who had helped

to rescue her from the dangerous position her fancy was recalling.

"There is no doubt," said I, feelingly, "that we are both under a very great obligation to Mr. Ransome. He acted with spirit and humanity, and I shall certainly lose no opportunity of testifying my gratitude by every civility it is in my power to show him."

"I shall go to bed now," said Phœbe. "Good night, papa."

I kissed her, and she left the room.

II.

It was unavoidable that I should see a good deal of Mr. Ransome. We met on the sands, on the parade, sometimes walking in the flat green country round about the town. In spite of our friendly dinner he seemed rather shy at our first few meetings; but at last gave up all notion of being regarded as an intruder, and joined us as often as he saw us.

Meanwhile the fright Phœbe had received had effectually put a stop to her boating. She now went to the other extreme, and

refused to enter a boat on any condition. Her resolution pleased me on the whole, for, though there was no doubt that the exercise had done her good, the risk she ran, even with a boatman to take care of her, more than counterbalanced the benefit she derived from the pastime.

To console her for the loss of this pleasure I hired a phaeton for the remainder of my stay, in which we enjoyed many drives. Mr. Ransome frequently accompanied us on these excursions, and on one occasion took the reins: he handled them capitally; but the horse, proving restive, he began to flog him, then urged him into a headlong gallop, which forced me into an indecorous attitude by obliging me to hold on tightly to my seat, though Phœbe appeared to enjoy the swift and menacing motion. I was heartily glad when the jaded beast faltered at last into a trot; and determined to give Mr. Ransome no further chance of breaking our necks, I took the reins from him under the plea that it was my turn to do duty.

I should not have mentioned this but for one circumstance, which left its impression

at the time, though I did not then bestow much attention upon it; I mean, that whilst he was flogging the horse a fierce expression entered his face; he used the whip as a savage woman, mercilessly and when, the horse pelting along at full gallop, he turned to look at me, I noticed that his face was pale, the smile he gave me almost malevolent, with its strange suggestion of passion, and that his eyes glowed with a light which strongly recalled the expression I had seen in the eyes of natives of India when inflamed with rage.

Now, though Phœbe may not have seen his face at that moment, she could have scarcely failed to notice the extravagant heat with which he had whipped the horse; but when I spoke of this after our drive, she declared that she had not remarked anything excessive in the flogging; on the contrary, she thought Mr. Ransome perfectly understood horses, that he had curbed the restiveness of the animal as only a man thoroughly acquainted with horses could have done, and that as for the headlong speed at which he had driven us, she had always heard that the only way to deal with

a horse afflicted with runaway tendencies was to give it its full fling, taking care to keep the animal up to the mark with the whip, and so cure it by exhausting it.

Her defence of Mr. Ransome proved one thing to me—that she admired him, and was therefore likely to find provocation of admiration even in doubtful conduct; but, believe me as you will, I never for a moment suspected that there might be a deeper emotion than admiration at work in her. That discovery was reserved for a later time.

I cannot positively aver that they were never alone together. Phœbe would frequently take a book on the pier or the sands, and on these occasions it might happen that they would sometimes meet. But had I ever given the subject a thought, I should not have felt the slightest uneasiness. My daughter was a lady; I knew her nature to be a frank one; I could not conceive that she could keep a secret from me; and from what I had seen of him, the notion that he could ever in any underhand way take advantage of the gratitude I felt towards him for the service he had

rendered my daughter, was not likely to enter my head.

A few days before we left Broadstairs, I found by the merest accident in the world confirmation of the truth of the incidental account he had given of his antecedents. I had received a letter from Dr. Redcliff, inquiring after Phœbe; and in order to fill a page, I mentioned in reply that we had made the acquaintance of a gentleman, named Saville Ransome, of Guildford, who had helped to amuse us during our stay at Broadstairs; and I then related the manner of our introduction to him. After some time Phœbe heard from Dr. Redcliff, who, in referring to my letter, wrote that a cousin of his, a doctor, was in practice at Guildford, that they sometimes corresponded, and that he remembered his cousin speaking in one of his letters of a patient of his named Mrs. Ransome—a well-connected, odd, old-fashioned lady, whose son was named Saville, and who had made rather a joke of herself by her fretful manner of speaking of her son's eccentric habit of leaving her without notice.

I was with Phœbe when we met Mr.

Ransome a few hours after this letter had been received. Phœbe, in her outspoken way, told him in substance what Dr. Redcliff had written.

"Oh, then," he said, "Redcliff is Dr. Tobin's cousin, for Tobin attends my mother."

I was afraid from the uncalculating way in which Phœbe had fallen upon the subject, that he would imagine we had been making inquiries about him; and so, in the best way I could, explained why it was that Dr. Redcliff had mentioned his name. He appeared perfectly to appreciate my thoughts, and deprecated the implied apology with great good-nature; and then recurring to what Phœbe had said, exclaimed with a laugh—

"I told you, Miss Kilmain, that my habits sometimes put my mother in a fever."

"But you should correct them if they distress her," answered Phœbe.

There was a freedom in the words, though none in the manner, of her reply that made me look at her with slightly raised eyebrows. But if she had paid Mr. Ransome

a compliment he could not have appeared more gratified.

"You make me very happy," he said, in a subdued voice, "by taking interest enough in my habits to honour them with your reproof. You set my conduct in a new light. I will endeavour to get the better of my caprices."

"Phœbe is rather fond of holding up moral looking-glasses," I said. "I suppose it is my own fault that I am sometimes dissatisfied with the peeps she obliges me to take. Monsieur de Miroir is occasionally an insulting personality, though he is always our nearest and dearest friend."

"How finely the clouds colour the sea," exclaimed Phœbe, changing the subject with a slight air of confusion. "Those long violet streaks look beautiful against the light green out there."

"The wind is in the east: we should be able to see the coast of France," said I; and so we talked of other things.

We left Broadstairs in the first week in August. Mr. Ransome dined with us the day before our departure; and warming to the memory of the agreeable hours we had

passed together, I pressed a cordial invitation upon him to see us at Gardenhurst, should he ever find himself in our neighbourhood.

Phoebe was not in the good spirits that usually possessed her that evening. I said to Mr. Ransome—

“My daughter is sorry to leave the sea, although she owes it a grudge. Phoebe, would you rather live here than at Gardenhurst?”

“At Gardenhurst certainly, papa,” she answered, with a glance at Mr. Ransome.

“But you are sorry to go home.”

“No, though I like Broadstairs.”

“We will stop here another week or fortnight if you wish. Shall I write home to that effect?”

She hesitated, swung her foot—Mr. Ransome was looking at her—and replied—

“We have made up our minds to go tomorrow, papa, and so we will go.”

“Very well, my dear. So far as I am concerned, I have had enough of the sea. I want to get back to my books and pursuits, and the quietude of the country. We have had a pleasant holiday, and next year, please

God, we will come here again ; where, Mr. Ransome, we must hope to find you."

He smiled, and after a short silence, thanked me for the politeness and hospitality I had shown him, in a curiously impulsive way, beginning the sentence energetically, and ending in the sing-song subdued cadence that made such an extraordinary feature of his conversation.

Phœbe rose and walked on to the balcony. Mr. Ransome exclaimed, "Is the night fine, Miss Kilmain?" and stepped on to the balcony himself. I joined them after a few moments, and saw them standing together ; he was pointing to the sea, and raised his voice as I passed through the window to let me hear that he was talking about the lights near the Goodwin Sands.

"They call that the North Sand Head Light," said I, for he spoke of it as the Gull. Perhaps, had I known their conversation before my interruption, I might have considered his inaccuracy very reasonable. "Come, Phœbe," I continued, "it is rather too chilly for you to stand here without any covering on your head."

She passed into the sitting-room without

a word, and a few moments after Mr. Ransome wished me good night, and went away.

III.

Gardenhurst was situated within a mile of Copsford, a handsome little town rich in antiquities. All about us were hills shagged with wood, and creating vistas to the horizon, through which, at the setting of the sun, it was a glory to look ; for then the land seemed heaped up with mountains of gold with dark green shadows upon their sides, while their outlines lay shaped in black lines upon the valleys. Very sweet was the summer wind that came floating down these hills, making shifting colours in the sward as it pressed the grass, and bringing to us dwellers above the valleys the fragrance of the bay and the ripe odours of the gardens and orchards of the lower grounds.

Gardenhurst stood midway on the slope of one of the hills called the Cairngorm Mount, because of the strange pale yellow tint it took at sunset, when viewed at a distance, and when all the other hills were

ruddy with the expiring light. The slope was very gradual, and contrasted grandly with the sharp declivity of the adjacent hill, which overhung the valley gloomily, and showed a precipitous front with its grey jagged rocks and swarthy verdure. The main road bordered the walls of the estate, turned sharply at its foot, and ran forward in a gentle descent to Copsford.

My house stood in the midst of some thirty acres of ground, and though of middling size only, was considered one of the prettiest specimens of old-fashioned architecture in that part of the country. The walls fronting the decline were of red brick, of which time had softened the vividness of the colour. On either side the door were tall windows with a stone balcony not above two feet high above the lawn, with a little flight of steps to the grass. Above these were bay windows, bold and striking additions, which produced the picturesque effect of overhanging stories, such as you find in gable-roofed houses, without trenching upon the strength of the foundations as overhanging stones are apt to do. On the left side was a terrace supported by handsome

Doric columns, the roof of which in summer was converted by the gardeners into a parterre. The windows of the drawing-room opened upon this terrace, and the contrast of the blue or crimson drapery with the white pillars and chequered marble pavement was charming. At the back were the greenhouses ; on the right was the principal house-door with a carriage-drive from it through an avenue.

This house, not above a hundred years old, stood in grounds which had known the cultivation of three centuries. The result was, the growth of vegetation was extraordinarily luxuriant ; for the soil was fat and black with vegetable decay, and so prolific as to keep the gardeners incessantly employed in freeing the beds and walks from the nameless fungi, weeds, and plants which would grow and flourish wildly in a week.

I had followed my father's taste in keeping the flower gardens well-ordered, but in giving Nature her own will under the trees down at the foot of the estate. There the grounds were densely wooded, and the grass was knee deep, while the ivy and other parasites cloaked the trunks with their

tenacious leaves, and swung their curling tendrils from the long boughs. It made a pleasant contrast to pass from the flower gardens, gaudy with brilliant colours and fatiguing with monotonous uniformity of carefully dug and fastidiously kept beds, to the green, cool, remote tranquillity of the trees, through which the sunshine shimmered soft streams of light at unequal distances upon the high grass, and where from time to time the rich and glorious tones of the blackbird or the thrush would rise and seem to silence and constrain the other birds to listen. Voices and influences gathered about one there to subdue one's heart to deep moods of repose. For many weeks after my wife died, I would haunt the soft shadows and linger among them for hours, finding such soothing inspirations as I could draw from no other sources in the tranquil twinkling of the leaves overhead, in the vague and sleepy murmurs creeping here and there, and originating I knew not whence, in the broad luminous stare of a rabbit, which a moment after would vanish like an apparition in the long grass.

A fortnight had passed since we left Broadstairs. I had settled down once more to the very placid life I had been leading before Phoebe's illness had interrupted it, and had well-nigh forgotten all about Mr. Ransome.

I need scarcely detain you with an account of my habits, or of the manner in which Phoebe and I managed to pass our days. Interests are created in the country which the denizens of cities might hardly conceive, and which they would laugh at for their triviality were they to be told of them. One may stake a large share of personal anxiety on the building of an outhouse, and the rearing of fancy poultry may absorb one's sympathies quite out of the highway of current political and social events. Do not suppose that we were hermits. The death of my wife, to which I have referred, had given me a distaste for society. I had still many friends and acquaintances in the neighbourhood; but my consistent parrying of their invitations had given them at last to understand that I no longer relished the entertainments which had amused me in my wife's lifetime. Phoebe shared in my indif-

ference to society, and so I could not charge myself with selfishness in leading the retired life I then did. But we would now and again spend an evening at a friend's house, or invite a neighbour to a quiet dinner, and sometimes make up a little party for a round game. But balls and large assemblies of all kinds we eschewed with a very sufficient reason; and so whilst we managed to keep our friends about us, we contrived to escape the arduous obligations which attend the lovers of society.

One evening, near the end of August, I left the grounds where I had spent half an hour chatting with one of the gardeners, and repaired to a room which I had converted into a study, built over the porch of the door.

Phœbe had left the house shortly after dinner for a walk to Copsford. I was deep in a book that had taken my fancy, and when I gained my study, resumed it with all the sense of comfort that is begotten by a snug armchair and a luxurious silence. But interesting as my author was, he could not detain me from the prospect. For ever my eye was wandering from the pleasant page to the near and distant hills, and the

deepening sky, and the magical colouring imparted by the evening to the high trees, the green valleys, the yellow spaces of the harvest fields. There was a wonderful repose in the air. The summits of the higher hills were still purple with the beams of the sun, whose descent they overlooked when their sides midway were dark with the shadow of night. Some of the hills seemed wreathed with foliage. Far down on the left I could trace the mere white line of the London Road veining the shadowy valleys, vanishing here and there under soft dark clouds of trees, and hugging the base of the hill close, round which it twisted its way to Copsford. That town was hidden from me, but many villages speckled the broad hilly landscape, and a few miles distant the smoke of a large manufacturing town clouded the sky of the horizon and gave a curious delicacy of outline to the wooded ridges behind which its houses were packed.

It presently grew too dark for me to read. I put my book down and left my chair, meaning to see if Phoebe had returned; but as I approached the door she came in.

"Oh, papa! guess who I met at Copsford!" she exclaimed.

"Who, my dear?"

"Mr. Ransome."

"Indeed!"

"Yes, I was in Queen Street looking into a shop. A voice said, 'How do you do, Miss Kilmain?' It was Mr. Ransome. I was quite surprised."

"Really?" said I, with a half smile, and perhaps more drily than I meant.

She blushed, and laughed, and looked grave all at once, saying—

"Of course I was surprised, papa. I did not know he was in Copsford."

"No, naturally not. And what had he to say for himself?"

"Oh, he was very polite and agreeable. He said that he left Broadstairs two days ago, and ran down here, meaning to spend a day or two in Copsford in order to see you, before he returned home. He recalled our strange adventure on the water, and then said, as I was alone, that he would do himself the pleasure to see me home. He walked with me to the gate, and would have left me there, but I could

not do less than ask him in. He is downstairs."

"Where?"

"In the drawing-room."

He was at the window with his back to the door, but he turned with a swift gesture peculiar to himself when I entered, and came to me quickly.

"How do you do, Colonel? I am very glad to meet you again. I hope you will require no apology for my intrusion upon you at this hour. I could not suffer Miss Kilmain to walk alone, and she was good enough to ask me in."

"You are very welcome," I answered.

"Pray be seated. I should have taken it ill had you come as far as my house and returned without seeing me."

I rang the bell for the lamp.

"You have quitted Broadstairs earlier than you intended, have you not?" I continued.

"To tell you the truth," he replied, laughing softly, and lying back in his chair, but with an air of easy good-breeding, "I found Broadstairs slow. There was nothing to do but bathe, and you know a man can't be

bathing all day long. How well Miss Kilmain is looking!"

"Yes, her trip did her a great deal of good. Where are you stopping?"

"At the Blue Boar in George Street."

"You should have come to my house. Remain with us now—I can give you a bedroom, and my man shall go for your luggage."

He reflected a moment, and then declined.

"What I have seen of Copsford," he said, "makes me think I shall like to spend some time here, and——"

I went to his relief, seeing him falter, and exclaimed—

"You can stop here as long as you like without the least fear of being thought an intruder."

"You are extremely good. I am throwing away a happiness——" and he stammered out another refusal.

I had no more to say. He knew his own business best. Perhaps he was right to prefer the independence of an hotel life to the unavoidable restraints our mode of living would impose upon him as a guest.

At this juncture a servant brought in the lamp, followed by Phœbe.

She had changed her dress for a white muslin, with a black sash and other half-mourning appendages, which I am not properly qualified to write about. The blush I had brought to her face in the study seemed to have settled there, and her eyes took a fine lustre and a bright vivacity from the contrast. I had good reason to be proud of her. It was not alone her beauty that gratified me ; her manner was charming : a mixture of maidenly modesty with womanly dignity. There was just enough of natural languor about her to soften the sharpness of outline which a radically impulsive nature would communicate to behaviour, and she could scarcely assume an attitude in which you could not have found a grace.

Mr. Ransome spent an hour with us, and then his manner became spiritless, and he got up quite suddenly and wished us good-night. I did not ask him to stop, having come to the conclusion that he was best pleased when left to act as he chose. I walked with him as far as the gate, and as I shook hands with him, asked him to name

a day convenient to himself on which he would dine with me. His time, he answered, was mine; any day would suit him. So I fixed Thursday, that was, three days hence.

Of course I never for a moment guessed that he was likely to protract his stay at Copsford. I merely looked upon him as one of those fugitive acquaintances one makes in one's progress through life, who had taken me at my word to call on me if he passed through Copsford, whom I could not do less than ask to dinner; and who, when he quitted our neighbourhood—which I supposed he would do within a week at the very outside—I should never hear of again.

When I returned to Phœbe, I could not help saying—

“There appears to me something very odd about Mr. Ransome.”

“What, papa?”

“His manner is so strange. Did you notice how all the life seemed to go out of him just before he jumped up to say ‘good-bye?’”

“I think he is nervous,” she replied,

"with a very proper dislike of being thought an intruder."

"Well, there may be something in that," said I.

"I like people with a dash of oddness about them," she continued: "were it not for the peculiarities you notice in Mr. Ransome, his behaviour would be as insipid as other men's."

"Oh! and so you don't find his insipid?"

"No."

I was silent a moment or two, and then said--

"I have asked him to dinner on Thursday. You can invite Dr. Redcliff to meet him."

"Very well, papa."

"Did he tell you how long he meant to stop at Copsford?"

"I didn't ask him. Our conversation as we walked home was all about Broadstairs."

"It seems odd that we should find him in our neighbourhood so soon, doesn't it, Phoebe?"

"I suppose he must be somewhere; and Copsford lies in his way home."

"How do you mean? Copsford is miles

out of his way from Broadstairs to Guildford."

She made no answer, and I was going to ask her if she thought Mr. Ransome admired her, nay—I was going to put the question in less doubtful language than this, but thought better of it, and made a remark which changed the subject altogether.

IV.

Phœbe and I had our different occupations and interests, which would keep us away from each other a whole morning or afternoon at a stretch. For instance, I might spend two or three hours in the grounds or in my study, while she was out walking with a friend, or reading or sewing in another room. Then, again, I was fond of riding, and, starting away for a canter after lunch, I would not meet Phœbe again until dinner time.

She was never dull; it was easy to tell that by her spirits. Indeed, I think that the apparent monotony of her life suited her, and that she would have been discontented had she been taken away from

the tame and tranquil interests which she created for herself day by day. Her character in this respect was a very promising one; and I would sometimes think that the man who obtained her love would find her a good wife. But this was a thought that very seldom occurred to me. The very monotony of our life would render her marriage a subject that rarely troubled us. Had we mixed much in society the case would have been different. I should probably have seen her surrounded with admirers—I may justify my assumption by instancing her beauty and the fortune she would inherit from me—and then consideration of her marriage would have been a permanent one. But she had no admirers now. We had withdrawn from the world, and the world had forgotten us. I clung to her as my only child, my only companion, and resolutely blinked the thought which would now and again enter my mind that in all probability a lover would one day appear and take her away from me.

That Mr. Ransome would be that man I had no more conception at the date to which this portion of my story refers, than

I have now of living another fifty years. Though he admired her, and of this I had no doubt, I could not imagine that he was in the smallest degree likely to win her affection. Of course I fell into the common error of parents. I saw him with my eyes, and assumed her judgment to be based on my perceptions. To me he was nothing more than a gentlemanly young fellow, odd in his manners, with a capacity of quick and even fierce passions, amusing, companionable, but essentially a fugitive acquaintance—one whom we had known by an accident, who would presently pass away and leave us scarcely a memory of him. And so I dealt with the superficial facts such as they presented themselves to my view, instead of adopting Phoebe's sight and looking deeper, and finding in his dark and masculine face a beauty that would wonderfully commend itself to women; in his very capacity of passion an antithetical quality of profound tenderness, not the less agreeable to the feminine nature because of the capriciousness that dictated its movements; in his oddness a characteristical flavour which a girl would relish as a redeeming excellence

in a behaviour which she might otherwise find flatly conventional.

How could I be expected to waste speculation on a stranger? Had I even taken the trouble to observe and study his character, my inquiries would have been directed by no other motive than curiosity—assuredly with no reference to the possibilities of my daughter's future, which might be involved in this stranger's existence.

Thursday afternoon came, and with it my two guests, who arrived almost together.

Dr. Redcliff was a man for whom I had a great esteem. He had attended my family for many years, had faithfully and patiently watched my wife through a long and painful and fatal illness, and had been a companion to me when the society of other friends had been rendered bitterly unwelcome by sorrow. He was a short, stout man, with a very intelligent face, shrewd blue eyes, and invariably wore a tail coat and a white cravat. He greeted Phœbe with a cheerful familiar inquiry after her health, and I then introduced him to Mr. Ransome, who had arrived a few minutes before. There was something

stiff and almost haughty in the bow Mr. Ransome gave him, but I put this down to nervousness. My friend apparently attributed his manner to the same cause, for he began to speak in his quick, cheerful voice of his cousin Tobin of Guildford, asking what practice he had, and if he had started a carriage yet, and so forth. Mr. Ransome answered him civilly, but preserved his distant manner, and then took an opportunity, when the doctor turned to me, to go over to Phœbe.

In a few moments dinner was announced ; I told Redcliff to take my daughter, and we entered the dining-room.

Mr. Ransome was curiously taciturn for some time, responding to my well-meant endeavours to draw him into conversation in monosyllables. I often caught his dark and nimble eyes travelling over us—resting longest perhaps on Phœbe, but taking a keener intelligence when they settled on the doctor. I considered his silence owing to the constraint which his nervousness would impose on him in the presence of a stranger amid those who were familiar to him. But all the same I was rather disposed to quarrel

with his want of grace : for his behaviour was inconsistent, and certainly not in accord with his usual conduct when with us.

The conversation during the first part of the dinner was almost entirely between the doctor and myself; it did not flag, for Redcliff was a most talkative man, with a mind stored with odd experiences, which he related drily and well.

I happened presently to refer to my daughter's adventure at Broadstairs, and the part Mr. Ransome had taken in it.

"And the tide carried you nearly out of sight of land, Miss Kilmain?"

"Oh, no, Dr. Redcliff, but a very great distance; almost two miles, I should think."

"At all events, I had to look through a glass before I could see her, Redcliff," I said.

"I suppose, Mr. Ransome, you found her very pale and frightened?" exclaimed the doctor.

"Rather pale, Miss Kilmain, were you not? but not frightened," he replied, smiling at her and answering her as though *she* had put the question.

She raised her fine flashing eyes.

"You found my courage as you rowed

from Broadstairs and brought it to me," she said. "It fell overboard, I think, when I was about a quarter of a mile from the land, and found the tide carrying me away."

"I know a man who went mad from an accident of this kind," said the doctor. "Shall I tell you the story, Miss Kilmain?"

"Yes, please, Doctor."

"He lived in Jersey, and had a little boat of his own in which he went fishing every day, weather permitting. He loved the sport, and was his own society, for he rarely took anybody with him. One day he hoisted his sail, and steered for his regular fishing-ground, reached it, threw his anchor, and began to fish. One of the sudden dense fogs which haunt that coast rose and hid the land from him. It grew thicker and thicker, frightened him at last, and he pulled up his anchor and began to row—there was no wind—for the shore, as he thought. He rowed until he was exhausted, but never approached the land. The night came, the fog lifted, and he found himself far out at sea, long miles of water on all sides of him, the glittering stars overhead. You must follow him in imagination, con-

ceive the agony of his mind, his sufferings, his terror, as best you may : he never told the tale himself. Two days, nay, nearly three days afterwards he was discovered by a French fishing-smack. They described their sighting a little boat, their approaching it, and their observing a man crouched near the mast counting his fingers. They hailed him, and he looked up and grinned at them with dry, cracked lips, and went on counting his fingers. They got him on board, and found him an idiot, too idiotic to explain that he was dying from hunger and thirst."

"What became of him?" asked Phœbe.

"His idiocy developed into madness. A few years ago he was one of the most dangerous lunatics in the asylum at L——."

"Think, Phœbe, what *you* escaped!" I exclaimed, much impressed by this narrative.

"No—I will not think of it—it is too dreadful, papa."

"That was a terrible misfortune to befall a man," said Mr. Ransome.

"I should have thought his senses would have returned to him when he found himself safe," exclaimed Phœbe.

"Once mad, always mad, more or less, my dear."

"Why do you say that?" demanded Mr. Ransome.

Redcliff looked at him with momentary surprise, and answered: "It is a dogma of mine, but you need not believe it."

"But you should know, as a medical man, whether your dogmas are right or wrong. Are you right in this?"

I saw a queer light kindle in his eyes as he spoke, but there was no temper in his manner.

"My experience of mad people is very small," said Redcliff. "But I don't remember ever having met a man whose unsound intellect had been perfectly recovered."

"What *is* madness?" asked Mr. Ransome, in a low tone, resting his chin on his hand, and revolving a wineglass.

"Now you would pin me down to a definition," responded the doctor laughing, and looking at me. "Colonel, can you answer Mr. Ransome?"

"No, indeed!" said I.

"Don't mad persons think sane people mad?" asked Phoebe.

“ Very often, and perhaps always, if every madman would express his views,” answered Redcliff. “ For my part, I am inclined to think that there are two sorts of madness—sanity and insanity. The only question is, which is the worst kind ? ”

He looked at Mr. Ransome to see how the young man would like this evasion of his question ; but he took no notice of him ; he was looking at Phœbe intently—so intently indeed, that I wondered she could sustain the fixed regard without a blush. But there was no rudeness in his gaze ; nothing but an expression of profound and absorbed contemplation such as might possess a painter’s eye in maturing a picture. The silence aroused him ; he started hastily, looked around him with a half-scared frown, and then smiled, and addressing me, said that he was thinking of the wretch who had gone mad with fear in the open boat.

I purposely emphasize his behaviour by exhibiting these small details of it, that the story I have yet to tell may lose nothing by want of consistency. I recall his behaviour now with a particular reference to subsequent events, and necessarily therefore

witness in it the significance which it certainly did not possess in the days of which I am writing. He was merely odd, in my opinion—nothing more: and there were times when the grace and even sweetness of his manner and its perfect keeping with all established theories of good breeding, would entirely qualify and even obliterate the ideas he had before suggested to me.

We sate awhile over our wine when Phœbe had withdrawn, and knowing Redcliff to be a miserable man without a pipe or cigar after his dinner, I invited my guests to stroll in the garden where we could smoke and enjoy the night.

There was a bright moon over the trees, and the near hills were white in its radiance, and down in the dark valleys the lights of cottages burned, and all about the horizon the heavens were brilliant with stars which twinkled largely through the warm air, but the moonlight made the centre of the sky pale.

We measured the lawn three or four times and then drew near the terrace on the left of the house, where the drawing-room windows were open and the lamplight shone

softly on the black-and-white marble of the pavement.

Phoebe, who possibly imagined we were still lingering at the dinner-table, stood in one of the open windows and made a singular picture with her head drooping on her fingers, her left hand supporting her elbow, her eyes bent downwards, and the warm yellow lamplight on her back and her left side whitened with the moonshine. She heard my voice and made a movement to join us, but Redcliff exclaimed—

“The dew is heavy, my dear : don’t attempt to come upon the grass.”

Mr. Ransome threw away his cigar and went to her. I was following, but Redcliff said—

“A moment, Colonel : I must finish this cigar ;” passed his arm through mine and walked me across the lawn.

“What do you think of Mr. Ransome, Redcliff?” I asked.

“I’ll be shot if I can tell you. One requires time to make up one’s mind about some people. But I can give you an idea which I’ll wager a hat you don’t possess.”

“What?”

"Your daughter's in love with him."

"Are you in earnest?" I exclaimed, hastily.

"Indeed I am. Do you tell me you cannot see this for yourself?"

"No, and I think you are mistaken. *He* may be in love with her, for I won't pretend to understand so odd a character; but *her* heart is still her own."

Redcliff laughed.

"This always happens," he exclaimed. "The head of the family never sees what is going on under his nose. Take my word for it, the young people are in love with each other, and before long you'll be hearing of it from one of them."

"But am I to suppose," I said, "that my daughter has fallen in love with a man whom she met for the first time in life not a month ago, and of whom she knows *nothing* beyond that his name is Ransome, and that he has a mother who lives at Guildford?"

"My dear Colonel," replied Redcliff, throwing his cigar away, "never take a view of love from the standpoint of reason. Besides, because a thing is strange or sudden, is that

a reason why it couldn't have happened? You seem to have forgotten, first, that Phœbe is young; secondly, that Ransome is good-looking; thirdly, that he has rendered her a service of some magnitude and of a character which must very eloquently appeal to feminine sentiment; fourthly, that you saw a great deal of him at Broadstairs, had him sometimes to dinner, and treated him with a great deal of attention; and lastly, that during the fortnight of your intimacy with him, his opportunities of seeing your daughter were plentiful enough to account for every apparent erotic impossibility you can name."

"I am perfectly bewildered!" I cried. "Phœbe in love with this young man? Impossible! I never yet introduced a man to her who pleased her. There was young Cornwallis—you remember him—as fine a young fellow as ever wore uniform—she laughed at him; her poor mother could scarcely induce her to treat him with common civility. And now comes Mr. Ransome, with his half-cracked manners and mysterious habits and dubious antecedents—for what on earth more does Phœbe know of

him than I know? and all that I know is, he comes from Guildford, and that his mother is well-connected — I say, here comes this stranger with his odd laughter and singular eyes, and gets my daughter to love him in a few weeks—I might say a few days! Impossible!”

I had quickened my pace as I spoke and approached the terrace. I was looking anywhere but straight before me, when I felt Redcliff's hand upon my shoulder.

“See them!” he whispered.

The windows were open. A cool breath of air was bellying one of the curtains inwards and exposing a portion of the room; and where the curtain, but for the wind, would have screened them, I saw Ransome stand close by Phoebe, in the act of kissing her hand.

“There, Colonel, you have confirmation strong as proof of holy writ,” said Redcliff.

I walked quickly forwards and entered the room. I longed to say something, and yet, for the life of me, could find nothing to say. I wanted an excuse to consider that Ransome had been acting an underhand part, that Phoebe had been deceiving me, but no

excuse presented itself, for the very good reason that there was none.

No ! indignation, pain, temper would not do. What had happened was my own fault. I had made much of Mr. Ransome at Broadstairs, I had invited him to Gardenhurst. I had never considered the probability of his falling in love with Phœbe, of her falling in love with him, and it was proper that I should pay the penalty of my shortsightedness.

Phœbe looked at me as I entered, and I was struck by the expression in her eyes, at once wistful and mutinous. Redcliff came in chafing his hands, and admonished me with a brief intelligible glance to keep my counsel and my temper.

"I am going soon, my dear," said he, "but before I leave you must sing me a song."

"Yes, gladly. What shall I sing?" she answered.

There was an undoubted reference to me in her manner. Perhaps my face conveyed a little story to her. I was certain she *felt* that I had guessed her secret.

"Sing me a Scotch ballad, no matter what so it be Scotch."

She smiled, gave me another glance, and went to the piano.

"I don't know music and so cannot offer my services to turn the pages," said Ransome in his most affable manner to Redcliff, presenting an odd contrast with the demeanour he had assumed when I first introduced him. "Perhaps you will officiate."

"Miss Kilmain won't require either of us. She sings from memory."

And Redcliff seated himself while Mr. Ransome leaned against the mantelpiece and there stood without movement, his eyes on the floor, all the time Phoebe sang. It was impossible to watch her fine figure, her graceful attitude, to hear her rich and thrilling voice lending the subtlest significance to every note she delivered, and not find an apology in it all for his love, if love he really felt for her. I could never hear her sing without a strange feeling of tenderness coming upon me. Her voice was very full of memories to my ear. My mood softened as she continued singing. I leaned my face on my hand and scanned Mr. Ransome as he stood opposite me, recalling special points in his behaviour to make the present issue

consistent, and discovering a quite new interest in him as one who had the most forcible claims upon my attention that any man could come to me armed with.

Redcliff clapped his hands as Phoebe ceased, and then looking at the clock jumped up, and said he must be off.

"Don't let my departure hasten yours," he exclaimed, seeing Mr. Ransome come to us.

"Thank you—it is past nine," answered Mr. Ransome, who then thanked me for my hospitality and shook hands with Phoebe. I did not press him to stop. We walked to the hall. I should have liked to exact a parting consolation from Redcliff, but even an "aside" was impossible, for Ransome kept close to us.

I shut the hall door upon them and returned to Phoebe.

She seemed prepared ; she stood at the table with her hand upon it ; the lamplight was full on her face, and her shining eyes met mine with a straight, steady outlook as I entered. I am not sure that I should have spoken at once of the matter of which my mind was full, but her attitude

was a challenge not to be waived, so I said—

“Phœbe, as I crossed the lawn I saw Mr. Ransome kiss your hand at the window there. What does that mean?”

Instantly a violent blush suffused her face; it was clear she did not know that I had witnessed Ransome's action. She pursed up her mouth to disguise or control the tremor of her lips, and after a pause of some moments answered in a low tone.

“Papa, we love each other.”

“Is it really so!” I cried, somehow startled by the answer for which nevertheless I was prepared. “Redcliff told me the truth then! His eyes are keener than mine. Phœbe, is it possible that you can be in love with a man whom you met but the other day—a perfect stranger to you?”

She made no answer.

“How long has this been going on, tell me?”

“We loved each other before we left Broadstairs.”

“But why did you not tell me? Why keep such a secret from me? You could have helped me to guard you from this

danger. What friend have you in this wide world but myself? Who loves you, who has your happiness always at heart, but your father? You should have taken me into your confidence, Phœbe."

"Oh, papa, do not be angry with me!" she exclaimed. "If I have kept this secret from you it was because I knew you would reproach me for loving him. Why do you call it a danger? Is he not a gentleman? Is he not my equal and my better? You know him only by his manner: but I know his mind—I know how tender, how affectionate, how high-minded he is, how unobtrusive and shy and sensitive. It was as much to guard *his* feelings as to spare my love from your reproofs that I have kept the truth hidden from you."

I was amazed by the passionate energy with which she spoke, and above all by her profession of knowledge of him which was as emphatically expressed as though they had known each other for years.

For some moments I could not speak, during which she watched me with the dark blush suffusing her cheeks, and her eyes absolutely liquid with emotion.

"But you don't know anything about him, Phœbe. You talk of him as though you were *sure* of the qualities you name."

"I am sure, papa."

"You have literally no proof in the world beyond the bare hints Redcliff gave you in his letter that his antecedents are even respectable. What do you know of his mother, of his family, of his past? But these things are nothing. The real miracle is that a girl of your spirit, who has never before allowed a thought of love to trouble her, whom I have sometimes thought I should never be able to find a husband good enough for—that *you* should fall in love with a perfect stranger, a fortnight, nay, a week after you had met him. It is incredible. Where is your pride, Phœbe? Where is your affection for me?"

She shook her head quickly to drive the tears from her eyes, but remained silent.

Then my own mood changed. I felt that I was speaking with unnecessary severity, and certainly exhibiting but small knowledge of human nature in expressing astonishment at the suddenness of her love. The fact of my not being able to witness in

Ransome the attraction and fascination which had conquered Phœbe could supply me with no argument. If I was to reason her into what I chose to consider common sense, I must not only not lose my temper, but I must take care to fasten upon and strictly confine myself to the really weak point of the affair, and that was our total ignorance of Mr. Ransome as man and boy.

“We will discuss the subject no further to-night, Phœbe,” I said, “I am positive you will require only a very little reflection to bring you over to my view of this matter. You have allowed your generous impulses to hurry you into an error. You have considered yourself under a serious obligation to Mr. Ransome for putting off to your assistance at Broadstairs, and your resolution to feel grateful has misled you into a sentiment which *cannot* be deep, considering that it has had no time to take root. You are right to feel grateful to Mr. Ransome for the service he did you; but really, were the obligation fiftyfold heavier, you could discharge it abundantly by a much more trifling tribute than the gift of your heart.”

I turned away, but she sprang forward and seized my arm.

"Papa, you may think I mistake my feelings; but as I hope to go to heaven, I swear I love Mr. Ransome. I have promised to marry him, and not even my love for you shall prevent me from keeping my promise."

An angry answer rose to my lips, but I forbore to speak it, and left the room, but more agitated, vexed, and astonished than I can well find words to express.

V.

I did not see Phoebe again that evening. She went to bed shortly after I had left the drawing-room, and I passed the rest of the hours up to hard upon one o'clock in the morning alone.

I did my best to mentally fasten a quarrel upon Mr. Ransome. I endeavoured to convince myself that he had acted meanly and dishonourably in taking advantage of the confidence I reposed in him as a gentleman, to make love to my daughter. But my arguments brought no satisfaction with

them. It was idle to call him dishonourable for falling in love. The fault of it all was entirely mine. So far from his showing any boldness in putting himself forward, I had had much trouble to get him to come forward ; he had hung back with a modesty or bashfulness that was almost phenomenal in a man of his age ; my invitations to dinner, my cordial receptions and greeting only had set him at ease at last, and then I suppose he fell in love with Phœbe, and, having regard to my polite and considerate treatment, concluded that his advances for her hand would meet with my approval.

The suddenness of it!—but then I had made up my mind not to consider *this* extraordinary, remembering how very quickly and easily *I* fell in love, and how very abruptly numberless persons of both sexes are smitten.

So I turned my attention entirely to him, his character, and to what I could recal of the little domestic disclosures he had sometimes made me in moments of mellow intimacy at Broadstairs.

My reflections ended pretty well as they

had begun, in mingled bewilderment and anxiety. Not just yet could I feel the pain which would attend the conviction that my daughter had absolutely surrendered herself to Ransome, and that I must lose the only companion whom God in His mercy had left me to soothe my solitude.

Next morning at breakfast Phoebe was very silent. She was pale and the hollows under her eyes were dark, whilst the eyes themselves were dull, and proved either that she had shed many tears, or had passed a sleepless night. I was pained by this contrast with the bright sweet vivacity that usually kindled in her face and never shone more fairly than when she had just risen, and said, gently—

“Phoebe, you are looking ill. Have you been fretting over what I said to you last night?”

“You spoke harshly, papa.”

“My dear, I did not mean to speak harshly. I have only your happiness at heart—I told you so last night. I considered that you had acted hurriedly and without judgment in allowing yourself to fall in love with Mr. Ransome without taking me

into your confidence, and not giving yourself time to learn his character."

"I do know it, papa."

"You *think* you do, Phœbe; but it is impossible that **you** should really know it **considering** how brief has been the time of your acquaintance with him. I who have lived much in the world and should therefore possess shrewder penetration than you, am puzzled by him. He seems to me to have many good qualities, and so far as outward bearing goes, he is undoubtedly a gentleman. But there are many strange characteristics mixed up with these good points, and these render his nature purely problematical. I have doubts of his temper. He has the eye of a man who is easily mastered by fiery and dangerous passions. I may be wrong, but how can you expect me to sanction your love until I have satisfied myself that he is worthy of it."

"But you *can* satisfy yourself, papa."

"How? he is only stopping here for a few days."

"He would not be in a hurry to leave if he thought you'd sanction his love. He

would visit us often and then you would see I was not mistaken."

"Has he actually asked you to be his wife?"

She answered "Yes," in a low voice.

"When?"

"The day before yesterday."

"~~He~~ did not call here?"

"No, I met him."

"By appointment?"

"Yes."

I felt myself grow pale. Here had been a real deception. She had never before deceived me in her life, and this first deceit shocked me as a bitter discovery.

"Have you appointed to meet him again?" I asked quickly, and with a frown.

"Yes, papa."

"To-day?"

"This afternoon."

"Phœbe, you are right to tell me the truth. I thank you at least for that. But I cannot permit you to meet him alone."

She gave me a sharp rebellious look and then bent her eyes downwards.

"Since it has come to this," I continued, leaving my chair and pacing the room, "my resolution must be taken at once. God

knows I would preserve you if I could from your own inexperience of life. But if you are determined not to heed my advice, then you shall receive my countenance, for under no circumstances can I allow you to contract an engagement of this kind but as a lady. Understand me, Phœbe ; my sanction is not voluntary ; it is extorted from me because I feel I can no longer trust you, and that only by sanctioning your love can I save you from lowering your dignity by stealthy meetings and deceitful practices. *These* things must not be. You have chosen your own course, against my wishes ; but your desertion of me shall not give me an excuse for ceasing to protect you whilst you still remain under my care. There shall be no shame in your love at all events ; since you *will* meet Mr. Ransome, you shall meet him in my house, in the presence of my friends, and with my professed consent, not in secret, not in such a way as to supply the gossips with tittle-tattle."

I spoke vehemently but decisively. She watched me earnestly, with compressed lips, and when I ceased, lowered her eyes again but offered no remark.

"At what hour is your appointment?"

"At three o'clock."

"Where?"

She felt the shame of this examination and hesitated, but was mastered by my emphatic manner.

"Near Rose Common," she replied; and then the same dark burning blush that had suffused her face the evening before mounted to her cheeks.

"I will keep this meeting for you," I said. "If my explanation does not satisfy Mr. Ransome the fault will not be mine."

I turned to the window, whereupon she left the table and walked out of the room. She sobbed once as she passed through the door. She had left her breakfast untasted, and for my part I had scarcely broken bread.

I was too much disturbed in my mind to care about riding that morning, and I passed the time as best I could in my study, where I gave myself up to much bitter reflection on the unfair and undutiful way in which Phœbe had treated me in withholding her confidence. She did not come near me, as I hoped she would, that I might sound her

thoughts and prepare myself for my interview with Mr. Ransome. I presume she kept her room all the morning, for the servant found her there at lunch-time when I sent him to call her to the meal, and returned with the message that her head ached and that she did not feel well enough to join me. This excuse, of course, merely meant that she was ashamed to meet me.

I seated myself at the table with a sorrowful heart. This was the first quarrel my daughter and I had ever had. It was an ominous quarrel, because it initiated a scheme which, so far as I could possibly foresee, must end in parting us. There appeared to me, besides, something of ingratitude mixed up in her behaviour. She had been ungrateful not to trust me, in shunning me when I was about to repay her deceit by setting her love for Mr. Ransome on an honourable and candid footing. A feeling of loneliness came over me; I felt myself wronged by her to whom my life had been devoted; I realized the truth, that the thanklessness of a child is sharper and crueller than a serpent's teeth, and my emotion was

so great that it forced me into shedding a few unmanly tears.

I presently conquered my weakness and sat awhile, until it was half-past two, when I took my hat and walked in the direction of Rose Common.

This common was situated at the foot of the hill that bounded Copsford on the west, and was a good twenty minutes' walk from my house. The afternoon was lovely; the sun's heat was tempered by the moderate breeze that swept the slender stems of the ripe cornfields, and a brief fall of rain in the morning had laid the dust in the road and freshened into vividness the green of the hedges and the emerald coating of the hills. The country, golden with harvest, was now to be enjoyed; early as the season was, the chink of the sharpened scythe stole through the breast-high fields: on the far-off hills the hand of autumn had pressed a pale red tint, and the trees in the valleys had a richness and fulness of foliage rarely to be seen in the less mature periods of the summer.

But I was in no temper to relish the ripe and swelling scene. I walked forward moodily, engrossed in thoughts of the lan-

guage I was to hold to Mr. Ransome. A few minutes before the hour I reached the Common, a broad tract of grass on which some goats were browsing, with a cottage or two peeping out from the dense shrubbery on the left, and the hill rearing its vivid bulk on the right and completely hiding the town that lay on the other side of it.

A narrow walk skirting the base of this hill took you to Copsford; along this walk, ere I had waited two minutes, came Mr. Ransome, slowly. He saw me at once, and stopped, for an instant only, then approached me swiftly.

"Colonel," he exclaimed, "I have come to meet your daughter—you know this?"

"Yes," I replied, "and am here instead of her."

"Hear me!" he cried subduing his voice, but looking at me with glowing eyes; "Miss Kilmain loves me, and our love for each other is assured. I have staked my happiness upon making her my wife. Have you come to separate us?"

"I have come merely to tell you this, Mr. Ransome; that from a conversation I had with my daughter this morning I dis-

covered that she loves you, and that she is in the habit of meeting you secretly; that I think her love ill-advised, hasty, and insecure; and that had her pride restrained her passion from indecorum, I should have resolutely withheld my sanction to her love; but that, since she has already committed herself by meeting you, since I judge by her language that I am unlikely to possess further control over her in this matter, I have determined, at least, that no impediment she can find in *me* shall supply her with an excuse for forgetting the position she holds as a lady and as my daughter. I have come, then, to tell you that you need be no longer under the embarrassment of meeting each other by stealth. My house is open to you, and *there* your interviews need not alarm me with apprehensions of gossip, which, long as my family have resided in this neighbourhood no member of it has ever, until now, in the smallest degree excited."

"Until now! Who has been talking, Colonel Kilmain?" he exclaimed.

"I have yet to learn," I answered.

"Your daughter's reputation is as dear to

me as to you. I would not willingly commit her to an action that would provoke a whisper from malice itself," he said hurriedly and tremulously. "What manner of delicacy is to be outraged by the meeting of lovers in secret? Can such meetings, which are thought harmless in others, be guilt in us? We dreaded your knowledge of our secret, because we could anticipate the arguments you would use against it. Our love was too young to be risked on an act of honesty of which you might have misconstrued the motive. I begged Miss Kilmain to meet me in secret that, by strengthening her love by companionship, I might defy your objections, ay, Colonel, and your influence when you should find our secret out."

He spoke rapidly, fluently, without a pause, ending in the sing-song tone that was now familiar to me. Had he been dealing with any other topic he would have amused me, for his odd rhetoric was irresistibly suggestive of the declamation put into the mouths of stage-lovers on precisely such occasions as we were then acting in.

"Mr. Ransome," I answered, "no arguments can be of use now. The matter has

gone too far. I tell you candidly that I do not approve of this hasty love-making, these precipitate engagements. We are scarcely more than strangers to each other. I do not question your honesty, nor will I charge you with deception in keeping the truth from me, because I look for protection from such painful situations to my daughter—to no one else.”

“I had no wish to deceive you. I have had no time, even had it been my wish to do so. Your daughter consented to be my wife only three days ago.”

“I have said all discussion must prove useless. Will you walk? I am returning to my house, and I invite you to accompany me.”

“Colonel, if I enter your house I must be welcome,” he said, drawing himself up.

“Welcome!” I exclaimed, forcing a smile; “what man is welcome to a father who would take from him his only child?”

He softened with extraordinary impulse.

“I do not take her love from you. As my wife she is still your child.”

“No, you alter love when you change its conditions.”

I turned and walked a few paces away, thinking he would follow me, but he stood still.

"Tell me I shall be welcome," he said, "and I will join you. I must assert my claims as a gentleman. If I am not that, I am not fit to marry your daughter, and in this respect you shall not get me to disqualify myself."

I hesitated. I scarcely knew what to say or do. I thought him right to insist upon my recognition of his self-respect ; but then how could I pretend, after what I had said, that he *would* be welcome ?

"You have hitherto, I believe, always found a welcome in my house as a guest," I said.

He made no answer, and almost losing my temper on finding how absurdly our positions were reversed, I exclaimed—

"I wish you to understand, Mr. Ransome, that my daughter shall not meet you again secretly. I give you, for the reasons I have already stated, the option of seeing her at my house. You may accept it or not, as you please."

So saying, I turned, and resolutely walked

away. In a few minutes I heard his quick step behind me. He came to my side, and said—

“You are right, Colonel. I am sensitive and obstinate. You have met me as a gentleman, and I am therefore bound to accept your offer.”

Vexed and agitated as I was, I had to bite my lip to restrain a smile. Indeed, there was something ridiculous enough in the notion of his making a favour of courting my daughter in my own home. But my light mirth was very short-lived. I was harassed, tired, and offended, and would willingly have walked the whole way to my house without opening my lips again. But he soon forced me into conversation.

“Colonel,” he said, “why did you call your daughter’s love for me ill-advised?”

“If you will but consider, you may easily answer that question yourself,” I replied.

“Is it because I am poor? if that is your belief, Colonel, you are mistaken. I am not rich, but I am independent, and could support your daughter without the help of one penny from you.”

“You misunderstand me. I am not one

of those fathers who take a mercenary view of their children's prospects. I would first seek in my daughter's engagement a more fruitful, and a more permanent source of happiness than money can supply. I would know if the man she has chosen for her husband is truly fond of her, not merely taken by her beauty, but resting his affection on other and more durable qualities; if their tempers agree; if he is a moral man with common sense enough to appreciate the weight of the obligation he incurs by assuming the charge and taking upon himself the happiness of a human life."

"One must hope for the best," he answered with a queer little shrug of the shoulders. "There are some things quite impossible to find out before marriage, and character is one of them."

"I don't agree with you. Some infirmities may indeed be concealed, but as much will be apparent as we need know to base our judgment upon, if the man or woman be not a mere actor. But then you must have time to make such discoveries, and that explains my meaning when I speak of Miss Kilmain's love as ill-advised. She does not know you."

"She does, Colonel ; she does, indeed," he replied, earnestly.

"We need not argue the point," I said. "She is quite old enough to know her own wishes, and to judge how wise or foolish they are. I leave her to her own judgment, only stipulating that, whilst she remains under my roof, she will never forget her dignity as a lady."

"Good God, Colonel !" he cried, excitedly, "would you imply that she loses dignity by loving me ?"

"I have implied nothing of the kind," I answered, chafing under his stupid misapprehension of my meaning.

He did not offer to speak for some minutes.

The more I considered the false position my daughter's folly had placed me in, the more vexed and anxious I grew. I could never have anticipated for myself a more disagreeable look-out than the prospect of having to argue and quarrel with the man who should ask her to be his wife. Such a possibility could never have occurred to me, because I considered that she was never likely to accept the offer of any man whom

I should disapprove of, or contract an engagement without giving me plenty of leisure to consider its propriety before being called upon for my decision. So far, indeed, unless I except the absurdity of his making a favour of attending me to my house, I could find nothing to object to in Mr. Ransome's reception of my remarks. I had said a good deal which a quarrelsome man would fasten upon and fly into a rage over; but he had shown no temper. He was warm only when he spoke of his love, and prejudiced as I was, I could not deny to myself that his love seemed perfectly sincere, for I found the chief exhibitions of it more in his manner than in his language. In truth, had I been asked the real cause of my annoyance, I should have put it down to the suddenness with which the discovery of Phœbe's love had broken upon me, and to the artfulness its concealment illustrated.

He interrupted my reflections after a long silence, by saying—

“Colonel, it is my duty to be perfectly frank with you. If I have not sympathized with your misgivings on this subject, it is because it has not occurred to me before

now that while Miss Kilmain knows as much of my history as I know myself, you are in entire ignorance of it. You will allow me to assure you that so far as my birth is concerned, I am a gentleman.

"Oh, Mr. Ransome, I never doubted that."

"My father," he continued, eagerly, "was a barrister, and came of a good Lincolnshire family. My mother—but a man doesn't take his position from his mother—I can only promise that you will find her a lady."

"Indeed, Mr. Ransome, these confidences are quite needless."

"I do not think they are; you must remember that you have said you consider Miss Kilmain's love ill-advised, because you know nothing of me. You *cannot* believe that I have been influenced by the least mercenary motive in making love to your daughter. She has made me very happy by consenting to be my wife; but she would make me happier still by taking me as I am—I mean by sharing in what I possess and allowing me to be under no other obligation to you than what I should acknowledge in your consent to our marriage. I am totally

ignorant of your means; and were you to tell me that you are worth a million I should find as little to interest me in the statement as I find in this stone."

He kicked a flint out of his path with a highly melodramatic gesture, and fastened his dark eyes on me. He seemed honest enough, and certainly his words were strongly flavoured with manly disinterestedness; but that peculiar manner of his, which no words can express, and which was as elusive to the faculty of definition as the thread of a spider's web floating in air is to the fingers, curiously qualified to my *instincts* the impression his words should have produced and made me more secretly restless than his "confidences" had found me.

But by this time we had entered the gates of the grounds, and were approaching my house along the avenue. I scarcely realized the full embarrassment of the position in which I was placed until we were in the drawing-room. Mr. Ransome had seated himself and was looking at me with speculative, watchful eyes. Meanwhile I had rung the bell and desired a servant to inform my daughter that I had returned with Mr.

Ransome. What was now to be done? Nothing better, it seemed to me, than to assume an easy manner, treat Mr. Ransome as an afternoon visitor, and after that to leave matters to shape themselves as they might. So by way of breaking the ice, and letting him guess my resolution, I called his attention to the richness of the trees at the bottom of the grounds, and the charming contrast of the green with the pale yellow of the further landscape. He came to the window and at once adopted my tone, commenting upon the beauty of the flower-gardens and praising the taste they exhibited. My sense of the ridiculous smarted to the absurdity of all this; and yet what other course could I have taken consistent with the part I had made up my mind to play? To be hard upon him, to say bitter things, to reproach him now that he was under my roof, was not to be dreamt of. He was here at my own invitation. On the highway I might say what I pleased; but in my house, whither he had accompanied me with reluctance, he was in a measure sacred as my guest.

So for some minutes we stood conversing

as though there was nothing in the world between us to cause either of us the smallest uneasiness, and then the door opened, and Phœbe came in slowly, with hesitation in every movement, her large full eyes luminous with hope and doubt and surprise. But that subtle expression of determination which I had noticed in her face the night before was not absent now.

I watched him approach her and take her hand. If ever I had doubted the sincerity of her love, my doubt must have vanished before the swift, beautiful glance she gave him, the momentary leaning forwards, the bashfulness thinly icing her deportment for a moment and then melting away under the smile which parted her lips and enriched her cheeks with a bright spot of red. Then she looked at me and an expression of misgiving and even fear, almost pitiful to behold, crept over her face.

"Miss Kilmain," said Mr. Ransome, slowly and in a clear voice, "your father disapproves of our meeting in secret. We must both think he is right. He has given me permission to see you here, and our thanks are due to him for removing the only unplea-

sant obligation that has attended our intercourse."

"With that explanation," I exclaimed, "I must beg, Mr. Ransome, that you will allow the subject to drop. I have put my daughter in full possession of my motives, I think I have been sufficiently explicit with you, and since you can reconcile my attitude with your happiness there can be no possible need for further recurrence to the subject."

Mr. Ransome bowed, handed a chair to Phœbe and resumed his seat; but let him mask his emotions as he would with urbanity he could not prevent his eyes from expressing his thoughts; and the brief glance I received from them ere he bent his gaze downwards enabled me quite to understand what is meant by the expression "looking resentment with a smile."

The small scene that followed would have amused a disinterested spectator, but there was something painfully disagreeable in it all to me. We conversed upon matters as trivial as the weather and the crops, and Phœbe joined in the conversation, forcing upon herself the easy manner that sat lightly on Mr. Ransome, but which needed a great

effort of my will to preserve in me. What irony in my shallow sentences and in hers when the theme that lay at both our hearts was thought of !

VI.

But this part of my story grows tedious, and I must abbreviate it.

It did not take me long to discover that it was my daughter's destiny that she should marry Mr. Ransome. The privilege he now possessed, of calling to see her when he pleased, would strengthen their love and render it more durable by supplying it with a conscience. My wishes had been defied, my control set at naught, I could not take interest in a matter I did not approve. My daughter had developed a quite unsuspected quality of headstrong, rebellious resolution ; I felt the powerlessness of my parental authority to cope with, or divert her from her passion ; and dreaded any exercise of severity lest it should hurry her into an elopement and so bring disgrace upon me and sorrow and remorse upon her. I therefore left her to herself, believing that her pride would draw its best sustenance

from freedom, and that her self-control which the liberty I permitted would make obligatory, would save her from the commission of any worse disobedient act than what she had already committed in engaging herself to Mr. Ransome without my knowledge.

But, as I have said, the one result of her liberty was to deepen her love by placing her constantly in the society of her lover. I rode, I went about my pursuits, I loitered in my study as usual ; I dared not, nor indeed did I choose to act the part of dragon. A man *must* trust his child. Truly enough Goldsmith has said, that the virtue that requires a sentinel is not worth the guarding.

I had taken Redcliff into my confidence at an early stage in the story of this love affair, and to my surprise got no sympathy from him.

He allowed that Phœbe had acted unfairly in consenting to marry Ransome before speaking to me ; but, if I would bate that, all the rest was human nature.

"When men get old," said he, "they forget that they were once young. How often was I in love from the age of fifteen

to thirty? Don't talk to me of fathers and mothers and guardians! I would have laughed at them all. Why, your stealthy meetings, your furtive kissings under the moon, are the real poetry of love. What song is so sweet as the words of the heart set to a nightingale's tune? When do eyes look dearer than when they reflect the starlight? Would you have people make love under chandeliers, in the highways, in the society of relations? Be charitable, and this you can be by subtracting twenty from fifty and thinking out of the balance."

"This may be very well; but suppose I tell you that I don't like Ransome?"

"*Why* don't you like Ransome?"

"One reason is, I think him half-cracked."

"Because he wants to get married?"

I laughed, though God knows my humour was grave enough.

"Suppose he *is* half-cracked — Phœbe should know; if he is, he keeps his madness well under—suppose, I say, he is half-cracked, what better evidence would you require of his aristocratical descent? Isn't he a gentleman?"

"Yes. He is a gentleman."

"Isn't he good-looking?"

"Well?"

"Hasn't he means of his own, enough to lift him above the possibility of his turning out a mere hungry adventurer?"

"He says he has."

"Isn't there a lord in his mother's family? Isn't he unmistakably fond of Phœbe? Isn't she dying for him? What more would you have in this nation of *mésalliances*? When Addison's Dutch philosopher fell from the masthead of a ship and broke his leg, he thanked God it wasn't his neck. Phœbe might have married a man entirely after your heart—and she might have married a man very much the other way. She has married neither. She is not the affiancée of a duke, nor is she planning an elopement with your gardener. She has found a well-looking, middle-class, educated young gentleman to fall in love with. He is satisfied; she is satisfied; and all that you have got to do is to become satisfied yourself."

All this was quite in reason. There are really few objections a man may have to his child's marriage which his friends will sympathize with, although there is no

other matter in which they are more disposed to interfere. That Redcliff, perceiving my uneasiness, could honestly think the match a good one for Phœbe, I will not believe. He had sense enough to see that Phœbe meant to marry Ransome whether I liked it or not; and in a true spirit of friendship set the affair before me in the brightest colours he could invent, to console me, in some sort, for the anxiety and depression I would not conceal from him.

Meanwhile the days were passing rapidly, and still Mr. Ransome remained in Copsford. He had shifted his lodgings from the Blue Boar, to a farmhouse on this side of the town, and here it was plain he meant to stop until his marriage with Phœbe should consign him to a house of his own.

By this time the engagement was generally known and talked about. I was frequently stopped out of doors and congratulated, and several persons who had not visited me since my wife's death, called, no doubt under the impression that my daughter's engagement was to initiate our return to society. Of course my pride would never permit me to suggest that I was not satis-

fied with Phœbe's choice. I was asked questions about Ransome with a great show of interest by my acquaintances, and I told them how Lord Carnmore was his uncle, and how he was sprung on his father's side from an ancient Lincolnshire family, which was true enough. His appearance and manners they could judge of for themselves. Indeed, Phœbe received many compliments on the good looks of her lover, and on his bearing and behaviour. Whether he was rich or poor our friends could not discover, nor on this point did I think proper to enlighten them. He was quite rich enough to please me could I have satisfied myself with him in other respects. It had always been my intention to give up Gardenhurst to Phœbe on her marriage, and settle half my fortune on her. My old home would cease to be tolerable to me under changed conditions. Memory would make it painful without the companionship of one or the other of the two whose presence had thronged it with its sweetest associations, and I could not tolerate the idea of sharing it with the master whom Phœbe's marriage would put in possession of it.

So that, with this plan in my mind, the idea of Mr. Ransome having but a small income could not have prejudiced me against him, since the fortune I was able to give her would make her rich enough to support her position with dignity and elegance. My real objection to Mr. Ransome lay in a secret and fixed dislike, not to be explained by any effort of my judgment. Often, I will admit, my prejudice seemed unjust to me because of my inability to refer it to a motive. Redcliff once attacked this antipathy, and pretended to prove that it could not exist, because nothing I could say against Mr. Ransome was sufficiently conclusive to account for it. He made out a catalogue of virtues belonging to the man—his modesty, his good breeding, his deference to me, his obviously sincere devotion to Phœbe—to every item of which I had to assent. How then could I justify my dislike of a man so deserving of esteem? But the enumeration of his good points did not soften my prejudice. Were he less deserving I might find him more deserving.

“You are angry with him,” Redcliff said, “for being the cause of your daughter’s

disobedience, and for diverting her love for you into a new channel."

"Perhaps so," I replied.

I could not explain an instinct. Why I did not like him I knew not; I could only say and mean that I did not like him.

Matters had been going on in this way for over a month, when one afternoon Phoebe came to me in the grounds to tell me that Mrs. Ransome was in the drawing-room, and wished to see me.

I had often wondered to myself how long it would be before this lady came upon the scene, whether, indeed, it might not end in my having to go to her. But her visit now surprised me, for I had no idea that she was at Copsford, and neither Phoebe nor Ransome had hinted that she was likely to visit us.

I was walking towards the house, when Phoebe said—

"Papa, I did not know that Mrs. Ransome was in Copsford."

"I could not assume you were ignorant by your not telling me," I replied.

"I have no secrets from you now," she

exclaimed, quickly. "You wrong me if you think I have."

"Is Mr. Ransome with his mother?"

"Yes."

"Did *he* know she was coming to Copsford?"

"No. She arrived at half-past twelve to-day, and took Saville by surprise."

I asked no more questions, but went straight to the drawing-room. I heard Mrs. Ransome's voice before I opened the door—a shrill, eager, excited voice, so characteristic that I think I could have formed a tolerably accurate idea of the woman it belonged to before seeing her.

I entered the room followed by Phœbe, and found mother and son standing together by the table—the son looking a giant beside the dwarf who had given him birth. She was the smallest woman I ever saw outside a travelling circus. But no part of her was out of proportion: her head, arms, and body were in perfect keeping with one another. So far as I could judge, she was about sixty years old; she had a long, aquiline nose, her eyes were a light moist blue; her cheeks were pale, and the skin of

the face tight upon it, so as to take a polish from its contraction over the cheek-bones and chin. Her forehead presented the most delicate network imaginable of wrinkles, which crossed and re-crossed each other, each wrinkle as fine as the line of a spider's web. She wore sausage curls confined to their place by stout tortoiseshell combs. Her bonnet was large, and made larger yet by a big grey feather; her dress consisted of a rich silk mantle and a black satin gown. There was exquisite neatness in her attire; her gloves were new, and fitted her faultlessly; her collar was of fine lace, her parasol lined with crimson.

No description would better express her than to say that she resembled a large, well-formed woman viewed through the wrong end of an opera-glass.

She was rattling away shrilly and volubly when I entered, but instantly held her tongue and approached me with a short flighty walk, consisting partly of a hop and partly of a stride. Mr. Ransome introduced us; but she was not satisfied with bowing; she ran up to me holding out her hand.

"Extremely glad to meet you, Colonel

Kilmain. Have heard so much of you from Saville, that I seem to know you as well as if we had been acquainted for years. Pray tell me, now, aren't you surprised to see me? Saville was quite astonished when he found me in his sitting-room at the farmhouse, weren't you, my dear? You see, I didn't know whether to come or not. Of course I was anxious to meet my dear daughter-in-law who is to be—ah! Colonel Kilmain, you are indeed fortunate in having such a beautiful girl for a child. Well, as I was saying, for the last week I had been making up my mind to come to Copsford. I wouldn't say a word about it to Saville for this reason: if I couldn't come on the day he expected me, he would be disappointed. But here I am now, and oh, those horrid coaches! I was never so jumbled and shaken in all my life. My dear, can you oblige me with a fan?"

Phoebe took one from the table, and Mrs. Ransome sank into an armchair, having delivered the above speech in a breath.

I bade her welcome to my house, and asked her if she would take some refreshment. Yes, she would be thankful for a

glass of wine; had she known it was such a long way from the farm to Gardenhurst she would have driven.

Whilst Phœbe rang the bell, the old lady attentively observed me, and then asked her son to name the person I reminded her of. She gave him no time to answer, but instantly said, "Sir Percival Sheldon, her husband's dearest friend. I was the living image of him. Ah! he was a fine gentleman, one of the old school—people must go a long way to meet men of his stamp now."

Gurrulous as she was, still she was a lady. She articulated her words with a refined and cultured accent, she fanned herself with just the sort of air with which one would imagine a fan to have been used by a lady of fashion and distinction fifty years before, and there was an antique grace in the very attitude she adopted when she sank into her chair. Her littleness seemed to purify her. Her minute manners, her trim affectations were like miniature painting on ivory; the same subject transferred to larger canvas would have borrowed a quality of coarseness from the mere effect of size.

She sipped her wine, chatting away freely.

I watched Phœbe to observe the effect the little old lady produced on her; but she seemed merely amused, laughed often, whilst her heightened colour showed her by no means insensible to the direct bits of praise she from time to time received from Mrs. Ransome.

Mr. Ransome was silent, as indeed he could hardly help being, seeing that it was almost impossible to edge in a word amid his mother's swiftly uttered sentences; but he had an unconcerned face, and appeared in no wise embarrassed by her volubility.

Presently she turned to them, and said—

“Go into the garden, my dears. I wish to have a private chat with Colonel Kilmain.”

Phœbe laughed outright at this injunction, but rose nevertheless and went to the window, which she opened. I was rather astonished by the old lady's cool dismissal of these two, but offered no remark. Ransome looked at me, and, after a slight hesitation, exclaimed—“I hope, Colonel, that our withdrawal will not be disagreeable to you?” He chided his mother with a quick glance.

I answered, "Certainly not. But there is no necessity for you to leave the room. Mrs. Ransome and I can converse in the library."

"Ah, you are too amiable," she cried. "I expect the young to oblige the old—that is, their elders. Why should we leave when *they* can leave?"

"I want to speak to the gardener, and thank you for giving me an opportunity to go to him at once," said Phoebe, laughing; and out she went, followed by her lover.

It struck me that she would not have been pleased with so peremptory a dismissal from anybody else—certainly not from me.

Mrs. Ransome ran to look at them walking together, and came back exclaiming—

"Are they not a handsome couple? Are they not beautifully matched?" and then cackled on, "I thought I would lose no time in calling upon you and talking this marriage over. I give my heartfelt sanction because Saville is quite too clever to be mistaken in his choice. Your daughter is a delightful lady, and I am persuaded they will be happy."

"I suppose," said I, "you know that we

met your son accidentally at Broadstairs, and that he and my daughter profess to have been in love with each other before we left the seaside, which would scarcely give them a fortnight to become acquainted in?"

"Yes, Saville wrote that it was love on both sides at first sight. And you see they are not mistaken. They have shown great constancy, have they not?"

A little triumphant light shone in her eyes as she cast them around the room. Where *his* great constancy was I could not see; but Phœbe had certainly shown obstinate constancy in persevering in a cause which had cooled my heart towards her.

"As the parents of these young people," I exclaimed, stirred somewhat by the thought I have just written, "there should be no lack of sincerity between us, and you must therefore allow me to say that I think this engagement injudicious, for the reason that it was entered on without either of our consents having been asked, and, I may add, persisted in in opposition to my implied wishes."

She opened her little eyes wide, and turning up her small face, marked with a striking expression of gravity, exclaimed, shortly—

"What makes you averse to your daughter's marriage with Saville?"

"My daughter knew nothing of the character of your son at the time of bestowing her love on him. There was an impulsive haste in this secret surrender of her affections which annoyed and filled me with anxiety when I eventually discovered it."

"Well," she replied, coolly, "I thought the same thing when Saville wrote to tell me that he was engaged to be married, and how long he had known your daughter. What did *he* know of her character? how was *he* to judge that she would make him a good wife? But *there* is Saville's weakness. His confidence is too generous, he distrusts nobody but himself, he is all intellect and sensibility."

I controlled the irritation which this highly maternal view of Mr. Ransome excited, and said—

"What has happened is, I am afraid, past the time of cure, if not of regret. My daughter is old enough to be her own mistress, she has taken her course and must walk in it, since she will not acknowledge my direction."

in your marriages as in any of your other affairs. Yet they come to us in their troubles, don't they, Colonel Kilmain? They find out their best friends when they want them."

I looked at Phœbe, but she avoided my eye. It was nearly five o'clock, and I had a letter to write before the quarter past, ready for the postman who called at that hour in the afternoon. So having mentioned this to excuse myself for leaving the room, I asked Mrs. Ransome to stop to dinner, inviting her out of pure form, and most inhospitably hoping that she would decline. It seemed to me certain that she would have accepted but for her son, who regarded her fixedly. She smiled—caught her son's eye—and declined. Then *he* stepped in, thanked me for my politeness, but regretted that his mother's health was wayward, that she was used to regular and primitive habits, &c. &c., to all which she said, "Yes, it is so."

I bowed to her and left the room, and when I passed the drawing-room twenty minutes afterwards they were gone.

VII.

Phœbe asked me when we met, what I thought of Mrs. Ransome. My answer was—

“What do *you* think? My opinion is nothing. She will be your relative, not mine.”

“I like her,” she replied. “She is quaint and old-fashioned, and is the oddest little body to look at that ever I heard of. But I am quite sure she is good-natured, and would be thought a model little lady by the people of her generation.”

“Very well, my dear ; if you like her, that is enough.”

“But don’t you like her?”

“I should not fancy her as a mother-in-law,” I replied, shortly.

“But I am not going to live with her. And she is certainly not a connexion to be ashamed of should she visit me after my marriage.”

The confident way in which she spoke of her marriage, as though my consent were perfectly genuine, and I could find no single ground for dissatisfaction, always irritated

me quietly. But I never permitted myself to lose my temper with her. For what good? as the French say. I had been forced by her covert actions at the beginning of her engagement into acquiescence in her wishes; the attitude I had then taken I had never departed from. If the days which were passing over her head were not modifying the conclusions she had formed of Ransome's character, temper, and virtues, her want of perception was not my fault. Had she permitted me, I would have done my duty by her faithfully; but she had rejected my advice, she had thrust me aside from her counsels, and there was simply nothing for me to do but let matters take their course.

Any attempt at forcing her away from her wishes must have ended in my defeat. I lacked the moral power to make my love wise with severity. Besides, I knew enough of her character to fear the effect of determined behaviour, had I not been too weakly soft-hearted to exercise it.

I grieved over her: yet in my heart of hearts I did not, I could not blame her. I attach little value to those spectacles of filial

love which the stage and the novel from time to time submit to us. I take human nature as I find it, and believe in the wisdom of Providence who appoints a time in the child's life when the voice of the parent can no longer prevail. Every man must wish his child to walk as he directs; but a just father will temper the grief and pain the disobedience of his child causes him by recalling his own appeals from the parental authority the moralist would make it binding on him to obey, his own departure from his parent's wishes, his own final assumption of independent action. Suffering and experience will soften a man and make him tender in handling those special features of human nature which the maxims clap strait jackets upon, and cripple with inexorable usage.

Having once met Mrs. Ransome, I expected to see her every day at my house; but I was agreeably disappointed. She seemed to be inspired with the same bashfulness that had restrained her son when we had first known him: and during the three weeks she stopped at Copsford, she dined with us once and called four times only.

On these occasions she had talked with her accustomed volubility, and I had noticed that she always seemed best pleased when her son was out of the room, for he decidedly influenced her choice of topics, though when she was free to speak as she chose, nothing ever escaped her which her son could have found fault with.

So garrulous a lady would soon make acquaintance in the neighbourhood; and before she was at Copsford a fortnight people were talking of her as the mother of the gentleman Miss Kilmain was going to marry. I learned, from the way she discussed the affair, that she was very proud of her son's engagement, and I was also told that she spoke in high terms of me, affirming that I was a man after her own heart, with other compliments which I need not repeat.

Indeed, I must do both mother and son the justice to say that they did all they could to make the marriage tolerable to me. Mr. Ransome never remitted a highly deferential manner which he had assumed shortly after my interview with him at Rose Common; and there was a subtle compliment implied

in his anxiety to please me, which, had I been less prejudiced, I might have more readily appreciated, since he was too secure of Phœbe's love to fear my influence, and the respect he showed me was therefore quite beside that consideration.

The day before she returned to Guildford, Mrs. Ransome called to say good-bye. She caught me as I was about to mount my horse. I accompanied her to the drawing-room, but fortunately the horse at the door was too broad a hint for her to miss, and she did not stay above ten minutes.

"I don't know," she said, in the course of our brief conversation, "if Phœbe has named the day. Saville is close; I can't get to hear from him when he is to be married."

"My daughter has hitherto acted quite independently of me," I replied; "so there is no reason to suppose that she has not fixed a day for her marriage because I am ignorant of it."

"Do I understand, Colonel Kilmain, that at this eleventh hour you still withhold your consent from your daughter's marriage?" cried the little lady, staring at me with vague dilated eyes.

"I thought I had explained," I answered stiffly. "My consent *has* been given—after a manner. Phœbe exactly knows its character, and how far she may congratulate herself upon its cordiality."

She left her chair shaking her head and exclaiming, "The course of true love never did run smooth!" And then looking at me very steadily, and with quite a sinister expression in her eyes, she added, "If *I* were Saville, I would not lower myself by deigning to accept a gift so grudgingly bestowed as Phœbe's hand. I only hope that his wife will appreciate the sweetness and temper he has shown throughout this strange engagement."

I received her satirical curtsey in silence, shrinking from the skirmish her words threatened to involve me in. I accompanied her to the hall, she dropped me another curtsey, and went away.

I had no fault to find with this sudden exhibition of bitterness. The real wonder was that she should have so long disguised the feelings which the unmistakable attitude I had taken with respect to Phœbe's engagement was bound to excite. Indeed, I

relished her indignation as a distinct piece of honesty amid much that was suggestive of doubtful and paltry motives. Had her son acted with the same frankness I should have liked him much better for it.

At last it came to this, and then the first act of this singular story was over.

A week or two after Mrs. Ransome had left Copsford, her son called upon me. From the dining-room window I saw him come along the avenue; he asked the servant if I was at home, and this inquiry for me at once decided in my mind the object that had brought him to the house.

He was nervous and pale. I requested him to be seated, and remained silent, determined not to help him one jot towards an issue I had never more sincerely deprecated than at that moment.

"I'll not beat about the bush, Colonel," he began, locking his hands to steady the nervous twitchings of his arms, and regarding me with strange and almost pathetic wistfulness. "Phoebe has consented to marry me on the second of next month, and we only wait to receive your approval of our intention."

"Very well," I answered. "She knows better than I whether that will give her time for her preparations. If you have fixed on the second of next month, let the ceremony take place on that day. What will satisfy her will satisfy me."

"I wish we had your sympathy. I do not speak for myself, but for her. So far as *I* am concerned, I do not hope to remove your prejudices to this marriage, though I protest before heaven, I am ignorant of the reasons you have for your special dissatisfaction with Phœbe's choice."

"This is hardly fair to either of us, Ransome," I exclaimed, forcing a smile. "Of one thing be assured—you wrong me if you think you have not my sympathy. I wish you both all joy, and shall prove my sincerity by doing my utmost to contribute to your happiness."

He bowed, but my tone was too constrained to permit him to accept my words with the significance they would have taken from a cordial manner.

Observing him silent, I continued—

"It is proper I should explain my plans to you with respect to my daughter's

settlement, from which it was never my intention to depart, under any circumstances. I shall resign this house to her, and settle upon her a fortune that will enable her to support her position with dignity and comfort. In the event of her dying without issue, the property reverts to me, or, in case of my death, to my next of kin. I intend no disrespect by these arrangements. Had Phœbe married the first lord in the country, I should have insisted upon the same conditions."

"You are quite right. I would much rather she should keep what she brings. There is no sacrifice, short of relinquishing her, which I would not make to prove that I marry Phœbe for herself only."

"Oh, I could not question your sincerity in the face of her convictions. She must know you better than I, and her constancy should prove yours."

Here all that need be repeated of our conversation terminated. I think he was surprised to find how easily I had acquiesced in his arrangements. But he was greatly mistaken if he supposed I should review my objections in the teeth of an opposi-

tion which I knew must eventually defeat me.

But I had still one final word to say to Phœbe. I joined her in the drawing-room after Ransome had left the house, and said—

“Mr. Ransome tells me you have fixed upon the second of next month for your marriage.”

She coloured up, but answered steadily—

“Yes, papa. Is it too soon?”

“You should know better than I. Have you thoroughly considered the step you are about to take?”

“Thoroughly; and I am happy.”

“You are not disturbed by the thought that the sanction of my heart does not accompany you?”

“Papa, if I understood your prejudice I should respect it, though it would not influence me, because there is nothing in Saville to justify any prejudice. But I do not understand it. You were annoyed in the first instance by my loving Saville without your knowledge. But I could not help loving him, and I was afraid to take you into my confidence for the very reason you afterwards proved to

me I was right to fear—the dread of your ridiculing my love by declaring it could not exist in so short a time. And then my secret meetings vexed you, and though I knew I was to blame, yet I felt I was sufficiently punished by your severity afterwards. These things prejudiced you without reason against Saville, who surely did not act wrongfully in falling in love with me. Your sanction would make me happier than I am if I had it; but your disapproval *does not* pain me, because I feel sure that the time will come when you will find out that Saville's nature is honourable and good, and that I was right in giving him my love."

I listened to her without interruption, and then said—

"I pray God that that time may come, my child. But whether it comes or not, never, until you are a parent, will you understand the anxiety and grief you have caused me since you first confessed your love for Mr. Ransome. No!" I continued, holding up my hand to silence her, "I must say this; but do not let it provoke a discussion. We are all the sport of circumstance, and

though my heart has misgivings which you are right in saying I cannot so convey as to make them intelligible, yet I have a humble trust in God's providence, and resign your future into His hands with a prayer that He will watch over you. May He bless you and guide you, and make you happy. Our separation may be lasting—for on the day of your marriage I leave this house never to return to it but as a visitor whose coming must be altogether dependent upon the welcome he receives—but rest assured that my love will follow you while my life lasts; let your future be what it will, on one friend you may always count who will never betray nor forsake you."

She ran to me and I folded her in my arms. We both of us shed tears, but I will own that my words had relieved my heart of a weight and that I felt happier for having spoken kindly to my daughter.

But a very few lines need be devoted to the marriage. A few of my best friends were present, but Mrs. Ransome wrote a letter at the last moment to say that the

state of her health would not permit her to join us. Phœbe seemed perfectly happy. She cried a little when we parted ; but I caught a glimpse of her face in the carriage just before it drove off, and she was smiling with an expression of triumph and devotion at her husband.

I now lay down my pen for the present, leaving the interval between my introduction and the story I have yet to relate to be filled up with the narrative of Miss Avory, my daughter's housekeeper, who was an eye-witness of events and actions of which only the rumours reached me.

Though what I have written is a necessary contribution to the story, I could also wish it to be taken as an apology for what, to many, may seem my weakness in suffering a marriage to take place to which I was strongly opposed. But the reader will have appreciated the difficulties of my position ; how I had to deal, in my daughter, with a resolute and obstinate nature that could not endure the opposition I made to her wishes because I could not exhibit my prejudice but as an instinctive misgiving which she refused to understand and take account of.



THE HOUSEKEEPER'S STORY.

I.

THE share I had in the story to which I have been asked to contribute begins in the summer of the year 18—.

In the first months of that year I was housekeeper to a gentleman and his wife named Mortimer. My wages were liberal, my duties small, and I was congratulating myself on the ease and security of my situation, when Mr. Mortimer suddenly died. His wife, through grief, fell seriously ill; her relatives—she had no children—took charge of her; her home was broken up, and I was dismissed with the gift of a year's salary to procure, if I could, another situation.

My having to obtain a livelihood by employment of this kind was owing to the villany of a lawyer who robbed me of the

small fortune—two thousand pounds—which my father had left me. My father was a Dissenting minister, who by great care and many self-denials, had succeeded in laying by a sum of money sufficiently large, as he thought, to supply me, his only child, with a competence for life. He had entrusted his will to the custody of one, Mr. Williams, a solicitor practising in the town in which my father dwelt, a man in whom he had the utmost confidence, and whom he would hold up as a pattern of honesty and sincerity. I was twenty-one when my father died, and three days after his death Mr. Williams left the country, having, as I afterwards ascertained, sold the whole of the securities which my father had placed with him for me, and leaving me not one sixpence even to pay the expenses of the funeral. Fortunately the house in which my father had lived and the furniture were his own; these were sold by auction to pay off certain debts, and the remainder of the money was given to me, with which I went into lodgings, and shortly after obtained a situation as governess. My duties were so arduous and the treatment I received so bad that I threw up the

post in disgust, and on the recommendation of a friend of my father, applied for the place of housekeeper to a family, with whom I lived for six years. My work was comparatively menial, and at first my pride rebelled against it; but I soon found out that what apparent indignity may lie in humble avocations depends altogether upon fashion and not at all upon fact—that a governess, taking a higher stand in the social scale than a housekeeper, substantially does work which no housekeeper is ever expected or desired to do. Good sense should free us from such silly prejudices as these.

The Mortimers' house had been in London. When the old gentleman died and I was thrown once more on the world, my health was not good. I thought a change in the country would benefit me, and wrote to a respectable farmer's wife, Mrs. Campion, who lived at a place called Copsford, about forty miles from town, and whom I had known as a member of my father's congregation before her marriage, asking if she could spare me a bedroom for a week or two. She replied that there was a room at my service

whenever it pleased me to visit her. So next day I packed my trunk, took the coach, and with thirty pounds in my pocket, all the money I had, went down to Copsford.

I recall this journey by coach for the sake of the impression one of the passengers made on me. When we had gone about fifteen miles, the coach was stopped, and a gentleman scrambled down from the roof and got inside. He was a dark-complexioned young man, with very black eyes and a short moustache, and I thought he was a foreigner until he exclaimed in good English against the dust and the wind, the first of which he said was enough to choke him, and the other to cut his ears off. He might have been right about the dust, for it rose in clouds under the wheels, and the gentleman's hat and coat were white with it; but if he meant that the wind was keen, he talked nonsense, for the day was oppressively hot, and the atmosphere of the interior of the coach suffocating.

An old gentleman, with a very red face, who sat in the corner of the coach, with a blue cotton pocket-handkerchief over his head, asked him if he really meant that the

wind was cold, by saying that it was enough to cut his ears off.

"I didn't say cold, nor am I aware that I addressed myself to you or anybody else," replied the young man.

"I really beg your pardon," said the other, bobbing his head in a kind of contorted bow, "I mistook you. I thought you a gentleman, or I should not have spoken."

"What do you mean, sir?" cried the young man.

The old gentleman pulled out a book and began very gravely to read. The other muttered something inaudible through his teeth, but finding that his staring produced no impression whatever upon the old gentleman, he jerked his hat off, fanned his face with it, and grumbled that the place was hot enough to cook a goose in. A moment after he roared out to the guard—"Let me out! I shall die here." The guard said that he couldn't stop the coach again; the gentleman must wait until they arrived at L——.

"We'll see about that," said the young man, who jumped up, seized the door, and

began to rattle it with all his strength, crying at the top of his voice—"Stop! coachman. I'm being murdered!"

I could hardly forbear laughing at the consternation his outcries would excite among the passengers outside, but they produced the effect he desired; the coach was stopped, and the young man, firing off a volley of curses at the guard, sprang out, and presently I heard his feet clattering on the roof.

There were several of us "insides," and you may believe, now we knew the young man could not hear us, that we made very free with him in our remarks. The ladies unanimously agreed that he was no gentleman; a young fellow in spectacles declared that, a minute more, and he would have knocked him down; and the old gentleman in the corner suggested that he was a madman, and bade me, who sat near the door, to keep a sharp look-out for the keepers, who were probably in full pursuit of the coach in a chaise.

However, I heard no more of the dark-faced gentleman until I alighted at Copsford. A phaeton waited for him, into which

he jumped, and was driven off; whilst I hired a fly, and was carried with my luggage to the farmhouse.

On my arrival Mrs. Campion came out to meet me, and I walked through a pleasant garden to a large, white-fronted, thatched-roof building, with a porch rich with woodbine and honeysuckle, and many handsome trees at the back where the out-buildings were, and where the hens were cackling and fluttering as they strove for their perches, while the air all about me was deliciously aromatic with the smell of hay and flowers. The house, indeed, with the sheds at the back, of which I had caught a glimpse as I passed along the road, was just a farm of the real kind, exquisitely neat and picturesquely rustic, without one ornate touch of any description to make a "model" of it.

Mrs. Campion welcomed me cordially, and led me into her kitchen-parlour, which the house door directly opened into, where I found her husband—a big, honest-faced man, who nodded pleasantly to his wife's introduction of him to me. This parlour made a picture it perfectly soothes the memory to recall, and I only wish my story lay in

this house that I might have a good excuse for describing it fully. I could desire no better Paradise in this life than such a place to live in, with the sweet-smelling porch close against the sitting-room, the room itself cosily decorated with burnished brass dish-covers and candlesticks, and a capacious fireplace, in which one might sit and look up, when the fire was out, and see the stars as from the bottom of a well, and a broad solid table, scrubbed to the purity of snow, and an evenly-tiled floor and comfortable armchairs, and cheerful prints upon the brown walls.

Mr. Champion went to fetch my trunk, and his wife took me to my bedroom and sat with me whilst I removed my bonnet and shawl.

"Now, Miss Ivory," said she, folding her arms upon her plump figure, while the kindest smile lighted up her comely face; "what I want you to know at once is, you are my guest and not a lodger, which I should be ashamed to allow your dear father's child to be. Please don't thank me, for if I oblige you in this, you oblige me just as much by coming, and so we're equal."

Her kindness of course involved us in a little amiable dispute, which ended in my giving in, and then we went downstairs, where a servant girl was preparing the table for tea. And what a tea it was! Rich brown bread and delicious butter, and new-laid eggs, and fragrant bacon, and sweet cream, and tea, the like of which I have never since tasted. Even had my appetite not been good, Mr. Campion's must have proved contagious. Such a tea as he made I never should have thought lay within the power of mortal man. His honest, cheerful laughter rang merrily across the table; through the open door came the delicate perfumes of the garden; the setting sunshine glittered in rubystars in the dish-covers and candlesticks, and the air was vocal with the songs of birds singing among the trees at the back of the house.

I need not tell you how I, who had been cooped-up in London for many months past, enjoyed this radiant scene, this peaceful, exquisite change.

When tea was over we drew our chairs to the porch, while farmer Campion lighted his pipe, and his wife drew forth a bundle of

knitting. We talked of many things, and I related some of my experiences as housekeeper, and explained that I could not possibly remain long idle, since my stock of money was slender, and I had nothing to depend on but my calling. Farmer Campion looked concerned, and asked me why I did not get married: to which I replied, that nobody had as yet done me the honour of offering for my hand. He pulled his pipe from his mouth in order to laugh freely, and striking his knee, cried out, that if it wasn't for Sally, meaning his wife, I might depend upon not being obliged to remain single long: which, as it was the only compliment of the kind I ever received in my life, I consider it due to myself to repeat. As Mrs. Campion's face looked doubtful, I changed the subject by speaking of the extraordinary behaviour of the gentleman I had travelled with from London.

"If that wasn't Squire Ransome it was Old Nick!" exclaimed the farmer, who had listened to me attentively, and now addressed his wife.

"Was he dark-faced, with a bit of hair

over his upper lip, and a queer black eye?" asked Mrs. Campion.

"Yes," said I, "and he had a strange sort of voice that died away at the end of his words."

"That's him! that's him!" cried the farmer. "And he called out murder, did he? I reckon it was a mercy that he didn't make some one else call it out."

"Who is this Squire Ransome?" I asked.

"Why, a bit of a mad chap that came among us two years ago, and married poor old Colonel Kilmain's girl—Phœbe she was called—as likely a lass as you'll see in these parts," answered the farmer.

"Not so mad as you think," replied Mrs. Campion, quietly. "More of a fool than a madman, though it was always my belief as his mother was wrong in the inside. He lodged with us two years ago come next August, the time he was courting Miss Phœbe, and often and often I've had 'em standing in this very porch holding each other's hands, and whispering under their breaths as though they were really dying of love; which they might have been in

those days. But time brings wonderful changes."

"Mrs. Ransome was with us three weeks," said the farmer; "as queer a little body as ever I saw—no higher than that," he added, holding his hand above the floor, "with just the sized face your's would show were you to look into one of them dish-covers."

"It was a queer affair, the courting between that couple," Mrs. Champion went on. "I used to say that the Colonel hated the thoughts of Miss Phœbe marrying her sweetheart, though there was a deal of pride in him—there was no getting at his feelings by his face."

"But the truth came out once, didn't it, wife?" said the farmer. "I heard Johnson the chemist over at Copsford say as how Dr. Redcliff, who was very often at Gardenhurst in the Colonel's time, told the young people when he was in a rage with them for quarrelling, that they were badly matched, and didn't deserve to prosper, because the Colonel never wished to see them mated, and that he blamed himself for not helping his old friend to put a stop to it, instead of

pretending it was all nature and the likes of that. That came to Johnson by Mary the housemaid as overheard the parties talking."

"You never told me that before," exclaimed Mrs. Campion.

"Oh, it went out of my mind: other people's business don't trouble *me* long," answered the farmer, shaking the ashes out of his pipe. "Redcliff was a good man, and, I believe, stuck to the lady while he lived. But, lor bless me! taking sides never does in marriage. No good ever comes of pitting man and wife against each other. If they can't agree, let 'em separate—nothing else 'll do, as any lawyer will tell you."

I was about to ask some question, when Farmer Campion, suddenly wheeling his big body round until he faced his wife, and giving the arm of his chair a mighty slap, cried out: "It's just come into my head, Sally, that they're wanting a housekeeper at Gardenhurst."

"Are you sure? Who told you?"

He scratched the back of his head, and said that he was blessed if he could tell, though he *did* think it was Mr. Simmons,

the baker. But, however that might be, he'd find out, and let me know.

"It would be curious if they *do* want a housekeeper," said Mrs. Campion to me. "You'd be pretty sure to suit Mrs. Ransome; but I don't know," she added, shaking her head, "whether it's a family that would suit *you*. That was the master, recollect, who came down with you in the coach."

"But I should have nothing to do with him."

"No, that's quite right!" exclaimed the farmer. "He's very little at home, they say: always tramping or riding about the country. No one sees much of him excepting his wife, who, I daresay, wouldn't break her heart if she had to dispense altogether with his company."

Saying this, he left us to look after his men. My curiosity had been excited by what I had heard of the Ransomes, and by their want of a housekeeper, and I asked Mrs. Campion some questions about them; but she knew very little to tell me. All that she could say was, that they had the reputation of being a very unhappy couple;

that Mr. Ransome had a very bad temper, and that his temper had quite spoilt his wife's.

We went early to bed at that pleasant farmhouse, and my mind does not hold a prettier memory than that of the sweet, fresh, pink-and-white bedroom in which I slept that night. There was a great moon over the hills, and I sat long in its gentle light at the open window, drinking in the rich night air, that crept over the whitened flowers to me, and thinking that I could hardly wish for more happiness than to find a comfortable berth in this delightful neighbourhood, that I might sometimes climb those noble hills and live in the presence of the gracious scene into which chance had led me.

I was awakened by the noise of the farm-yard, and opened my eyes upon a room brilliant with sunshine. It was long since I had enjoyed so healthful and refreshing a sleep. There was a bouquet on the toilet-table, for which, I afterwards learnt, I had to thank Mrs. Campion, who had brought it into my room before I was awake. A hearty

greeting welcomed me when I got downstairs, and soon we were seated at breakfast, with a blackbird singing loudly in a cage in the porch, and the breezy morning air perfectly melodious with the humming of the wasps and gold-ribbed flies among the flowers.

"I mean to inquire about that house-keeping matter for you this morning," said farmer Campion; "and I hope you'll get it, for then you'll be near us, and we shall see something of you."

I told Mrs. Campion that while she went about her work after breakfast, I would go for a walk, and inquired the way to Gardenhurst. But before I started she must first show me over the farm; and I was taken to a great open space at the back, with a little forest of stately trees all about it, where countless hens scratched and grumbled and cackled, and kept the scene moving with their restless bodies. Here were the cowsheds, but they were empty, for the cows had been milked, and were away munching the buttercups and daisies in a distant paddock; here was a dirty pond with ducks sailing upon its dirty bosom; and in a long

range of styes a great concourse of pigs were fretting the woodwork with their punctured snouts, climbing on each other's backs, squealing with voracity, and contributing a curious bass to the sharp trebles that rang from other portions of the enclosure. But I would no longer detain Mrs. Campion from her duties, and so, promising to be back in time for dinner at half-past twelve, I passed down the garden and entered the road.

II.

I walked straight forward, and arrived at a broad stretch of grass, sheltered by a hill, and faced by some dense shrubbery, which I afterwards heard was called Rose Common, and then proceeding along a level road for a short distance, gained the bottom of the lane which led up the side of the Cairngorm Mount.

The prospect as I advanced unfolded itself, and I repeatedly stopped to dwell upon its beauties. The hills lay heaped all around me, but scarcely any two of them presented the same colour. The sides of some were densely shagged with wood, and I pictured

the delicious coolness and solitude under the shadows of the leaves, the squirrels frisking among the boughs, the sweet wind rushing from the hill tops through the trees. The little villages peeping out of the valleys were sharply defined in the brilliant atmosphere. Yonder on the spire of a church, a gilt vane shone like a gold-coloured flame against the rich background of the dark green hill. The month was June, and the crops were still green, though high and wavy, and the larks soared over them, inviting the eye to seek them in the air, where the vain search was rewarded by the spectacle of the soft blue heavens with here and there a cloud as wan as the moon and no bigger, melting in the azure depths.

After I had walked and loitered awhile, I got into a main road, and came presently to a wall, which ran a long distance up this road and terminated at a gateway. The gates were open, and did not look as if they were ever closed. From the description of the estate which Mrs. Campion had given me, I knew this to be the residence of the Ransomes; but I could see nothing of the house owing to the trees of the avenue which

wound away to the right, and afforded no glimpse even of the grounds behind them.

The idea now occurred to me that I might as well call and inquire if the family were in want of a housekeeper since I was on the spot. Even supposing Mr. Campion had been misinformed, I could hardly be thought intrusive if I explained that the farmer had told me the situation was vacant. It was certain I could not long afford to be idle; nor could I trespass beyond a week at the outside on the Campions' hospitality. To be sure I had not been greatly prejudiced in Mr. Ransome's favour by his behaviour in the coach, supposing that queer individual to have been Mr. Ransome. But my experience as housekeeper had shown me that I should have little to do with the master. One place might prove as good as another. All about Copsford was delightful country; it would be pleasant to have such friends as the Campions in the neighbourhood; and so, everything considered, if I could obtain the post of housekeeper at Gardenhurst I might consider myself lucky.

But it was too early to call yet; indeed, it was not yet ten. In an hour's time I might

venture ; so I walked slowly forwards, and coming to a grassy plot, sat down near the hedge, finding that the road branched off, and began to look dusty and hot as the sun mounted. A cart came by presently, the driver asleep, with his back to the horse and his head on his knees ; but the horse went up the hill more steadily than had his master held the reins. Then several tramps came down the hill, walking in a line, and kicking up the dust with their dogged lazy feet. They did not see me, or I should have probably had them swarming about me to beg for money. There was a woman among them with her bonnet on her back, and her hair glued in black streaks upon her forehead with perspiration, who took strides as long as any man among them, and spoke in a thick voice, and had a wonderfully coarse laugh, and was, I think, the most unwomanly woman I ever saw in my life. I speculated upon their intentions as they swung down the hill *en route* for Copsford, until they had tramped themselves out of sight ; and then an old pedlar with his pack on his back came by, leaning on his stick and stopping ever and again to peer among the stones at

the side of the road, turn the thing that arrested him about with his stick, kick it viciously, and march forwards again working his under lip.

When presently I looked at my watch I found that a whole hour had slipped by since I first seated myself; so I got up and walked down the hill to the gates, not without a misgiving that I was acting boldly in assuming the family's want of a housekeeper on the mere strength of an unaffiliated report.

There was no lodge, and no bell; so I passed through the open gates along the delicious avenue, where the hard ground I trod on and the velvet sward under the trees were twinkling with the shadows of the leaves. On coming to a bend, I saw the house in the sunshine, with the conservatories gleaming at the back, and a broad lawn stretching in front of it like a carpet. A footman came to the door.

"Does Mrs. Ransome live here?" I asked.

"Yes, mem."

"I have been told that she is in want of a housekeeper. Is that so?"

"Quite correct. Do you apply for the situation?"

"Is Mrs. Ransome to be seen at this hour?"

"Yes."

"Then ask me no questions, but go and tell her I am here."

The footman stared, then sauntered off, and disappeared through a door. He returned in five minutes, and asked me to accompany him, and conducted me through a small ante-room into, what seemed to me, and which really was, another hall, with doors on either side. He knocked on one of these doors, threw it open, and in I walked.

I found myself in a large room, pleasantly though plainly furnished, with pretty pictures on the walls and flowers on the sideboard. A young lady with a small handsome face, dark eyes, and narrow well-defined eyebrows, sat near the open window with a book in her lap. She inclined her head when I entered, and told me to take a chair.

"You have applied for the situation of housekeeper?"

"Yes, madam ; I have been told that you

are in want of a housekeeper, and took an early opportunity of calling to offer my services."

She said that her housekeeper had left her in May, and that she had been making inquiries since that time for some one to replace her. What was my name, and my age? and where had I lived? and what salary did I expect? and did I thoroughly understand my duties?

Whilst I answered her questions she observed me narrowly, and whilst *she* spoke, I examined her. Her conclusions, as the issue afterwards proved, were satisfactory; mine, I will confess, were somewhat doubtful.

First of all I was struck by her haughty manner, expressed, not so much by her speech as by her lofty upholding of her head and the deliberate gaze she fastened upon me, as though her scrutiny was in no sense to be regulated by the embarrassment its intentness might cause me. Her eyes were very fine and flashed as she moved them; her mouth was small and the lips compressed; her complexion quite colourless; her dress simple in fashion, but rich in material, and fitting her fine figure exqui-

sitely. Her face was thinner than the peculiar character of her beauty admitted ; in health (I thought), or were she happy, those dark lines under her eyes would not be there, nor would her lips look pallid with habitual compression.

I was with her not longer than a quarter of an hour, during which (having exhausted her questions) she had observed that her household was a small one and that her reason for engaging a housekeeper was not to save herself trouble, but to obtain help in her efforts to economize. I told her that I thought myself qualified to assist her in that, as my knowledge of servants was great, and in my last situation I had the entire control of the housekeeping duties, and had done so well as to save Mr. and Mrs. Mortimer a fair sum of money a week out of the amount they had allowed me for keeping house. She would write to Mrs. Mortimer and communicate her decision. Where was I stopping at Copsford ?

“ At Rose Farm,” I replied.

“ Oh then you know the Campions ? ”

“ Quite well. I am their guest at present.”

"They are worthy people," she said, and her eyes wandered to the window and she fell into deep thought. I remembered then that Rose Farm had been the scene of her and Mr. Ransome's love-making. She looked up in a few moments and exclaimed, "I will write to you when I have heard from Mrs. Mortimer. Should her answer justify me in engaging you, you can enter upon your duties at the beginning of next week."

Upon this I bowed and left the room.

I got back to the farm by twelve o'clock. Farmer Campion was in the porch when I approached the house, and called out—

"It's quite right, Miss Ivory. They're in want of a housekeeper up at Gardenhurst. I saw Larkins the butcher who serves 'em, likewise Miss Reddish, who keeps a stationer's shop in King Street, and knows all about everything, and they both said t'other housekeeper left in May, and a new one was wanted."

"Very well," I answered; "I'll see what's to done in a day or two."

My interview with Mrs. Ransome had

taken place on a Tuesday. On the Friday following the Ransomes' footman called at Rose Farm with a note addressed to me, which, on opening, I found to contain this formal communication :—

“ Mrs. Ransome having received a satisfactory reply from Mrs. Mortimer respecting Miss Ivory's character and experience, begs to say that Miss Ivory may consider herself engaged from Monday next.”

“ No answer,” said I to the footman ; and gave the note to Mrs. Campion to read.

“ I don't doubt you'll suit them,” she exclaimed, handing me back the letter ; “ and I only trust they may suit you. But I'm pretty sure before you have been at Gardenhurst a month, you'll have seen some queer goings on. I'm much mistaken if the young wife don't want a good friend at her back with such a husband as the Squire to deal with. If she hasn't wonderfully changed since she used to come here and chat as pleasantly as yourself with me, you'll like her. But mark my words, you'll have seen some rare goings on before you're a month older.”

So I did, and within the time my friend

had prophesied. What these "goings on" were I will endeavour to relate as faithfully as I can, bating no jot of the truth, and I trust that my frankness will never be mistaken for freedom by the gentleman who has requested me to write down all that I know about his daughter and son-in-law.

III.

Monday morning having come, I was driven over to Gardenhurst by Mr. Campion, who carried my box to the house. The footman treated me with proper respect now that he knew I was housekeeper, took my box and asked me whether I would see the mistress at once or go to my bedroom.

"What is your name?" I asked him.

"Maddox—John Maddox," he answered.

"How do they call you here?"

"Maddox."

"Then Maddox," said I, "put that box down and send one of the housemaids to me."

"Yes, mem," he replied, and went away.

I was determined to let him see by my behaviour that this was not my first place.

Never in my life did I attempt to conciliate the servants I have had to rule by bland manners.

A good-looking housemaid arrived and conducted me to my bedroom, which, though at the top of the house, was no great distance to climb, as the building consisted only of two stories. On the first landing I passed a large room on the left, the door of which was open, and enabled me to catch a glimpse of a handsome bedstead richly draped, satin-covered chairs, and other luxurious furniture.

"Whose bedroom is that?" I asked the girl.

"Mistress's," she answered. "Yonder is the master's;" she pointed to a door on the right.

"Stop a moment," I said to her as she was leaving my bedroom. "I shall want you to show me downstairs to the housekeeper's room."

I took off my bonnet and smoothed my hair with my hands, and then threw a brief glance round to judge the accommodation I had been provided with. I could not grumble. The bedroom was neatly furnished and in front of the house; that is to

say, it overlooked the grounds which sloped for nearly a mile, it seemed to me, down the hill; at the bottom were the dense trees entirely blotting out the prospect in that quarter; between them and the house were the flower-gardens, and all on the right was the kitchen-garden, where the gardeners were at work among a forest of peas. The left was clear and submitted a magnificent prospect of hills stretching to the horizon.

"How many indoor servants are there?" I inquired.

"Four," answered the girl.

"Do Mr. and Mrs. Ransome see much company?"

"Hardly no one. They did when they were first married, but they don't seem to have no friends now."

"How long have you been in your situation?"

"A 'year and ten months, this week, Miss."

This looked promising. I followed the girl downstairs and reached the basement, where the housekeeper's room was, adjoining the kitchen. The cook, a middle-aged woman, came in to see me under the excuse to get a

piece of newspaper, and whilst I was questioning her about her work that I might obtain some insight into mine, a bell rang, and presently Maddox came to say that I was wanted in the dining-room.

I went upstairs, and after a little hesitation, owing to the two halls which puzzled me, found the door to which I had been conducted by the footman on my first visit, knocked and entered.

Mrs. Ransome was alone, walking up and down before the open window with her hands behind her. There was a slight flush on her marble-coloured cheeks, and an angry light in her eyes. The smell of a newly-lighted cigar lingered in the room, but the smoker was not visible.

She turned her head with a strangely haughty gesture, and, forcing a composure upon herself, said in a rich, tremulous voice—

“When did you arrive, Miss Ivory?”

“Just now, madam.”

“I wish to say at once that you will recognise no other superior in this house but me, that you will obey no other orders

but those you receive from me. You understand?"

"Certainly," I replied, somewhat surprised.

"The reason I discharged my last housekeeper was because she thought fit to disobey my orders by obeying those of another person, who visited us in April. If I die for it," she exclaimed passionately, "I will claim my own rights to the last."

I was silent.

"The lady I wrote to, Mrs. Mortimer, told me that you are the daughter of a Dissenting minister. Have you seen much trouble?"

"I had much trouble when I began life; but since then my troubles have been commonplace enough."

She bent her eyes on me with a frown of earnest scrutiny. I was struck by the intentness of her gaze, which, so far as I could read expression, seemed indicative of habitual distrust. Her beauty at that moment was very striking. She swept her hair behind her ear, and pulling an envelope from her pocket, exclaimed—

"I received this letter an hour ago from

my husband's mother. She was here in April—she is coming to stop here again next week. She is a meddling woman, Miss Ivory. I put you on your guard against her. If you value my pleasure suffer her on no account to dictate to you."

This frankness must surprise the reader more than it surprised me. I own that I was not so astonished by it—stranger as I was to her, and occupying as I did a humble position in her household—when I looked at her and saw that her mind was struggling with a painful grievance, and that her candour was the result both of helplessness and irritation.

"Madam," I replied, Mrs. Campion's words coming into my mind; "depend upon it I shall recognise no mistress but you whilst I remain in your house. I have had some experience of meddlers, but was never influenced by them in my life."

"Thank you," she answered simply; and the hard expression went out of her face, and she looked at me with something almost of gentleness in her eyes.

She then spoke of my duties, of which she explained the nature fully; and which,

greatly to my satisfaction, I found would give me more liberty than I had ever before enjoyed. There were no more outbreaks of temper; but several times, when she was silent a moment or two, I heard her sigh bitterly; and once, when one of the gardeners passed the window, she turned quickly, evidently mistaking his footstep, with a glance of scorn and dislike that made her face tragical.

I left her and went downstairs, where I found the housemaid whom I had before talked with sewing in my room. Being anxious to learn as much as I could of the characters of the people I had come to live with, I resolved to put a few judicious questions, concluding that the two years she had lived in the house would qualify her to satisfy me on most of the points I considered it my policy to learn.

"Is this your regular time for sewing?" I inquired, by way of opening the conversation.

"Yes, Miss, from twelve to one, after I have helped Susan to finish upstairs."

"Do you like your place?"

"Why, yes, it suits me pretty well.

Mistress is kind, though she is often put out by Master."

"Has Mrs. Ransome any relatives living in the neighbourhood?" I asked.

"None that I know of. She has a father who is an officer, and lives somewhere in France. He came here six months ago to visit his daughter, but the quarrels was so constant that they made the poor old gentleman dreadfully uneasy. I *did* think it hard that he couldn't find himself comfortable here considering it were his house before he gave it to his daughter. He said to Mrs. Simpson, as were then housekeeper—'For God's sake,' he says, 'be a friend to my child and protect her as much as you can from her own temper,' he says, 'and the aggravating man she's married.' I don't know what he expected Mrs. Simpson to do, but Mrs. Simpson told me this herself."

"Perhaps the quarrels were caused by his interference," said I, rather doubting that little bit about "the aggravating man" which she had put into the Colonel's mouth.

"No, indeed, they were not. I can answer for that myself. The Colonel's a

perfect gentleman, and was always trying to pacify them."

"But what is the reason of these quarrels?" I exclaimed, disposed to consider them largely due to Mrs. Ransome, who had struck me as possessing a very dangerous temper.

"Nothing but wickedness," answered the girl, sewing quickly, "and I don't care who hears me say so."

"Who is to blame?"

"Why, the master," she cried, looking up. "I heard it said at Copsford—that's where I belong to—before I came here that there was a good deal of love between them, but most on her side; and for a time things did go on very pleasantly, but they got arguing at last, and then took to quarrelling; and sometimes I'm truly grateful no one can hear 'em but those in the kitchen, for he talks so madly and she screams, you'd hardly think you were in a gentleman's house. I've heard a thing or two since I've been here, though not through listening, but because the secrets was forced upon my ear by the loud voice they were spoken in."

"These secrets are nobody's concern."

"No, certainly not, and I never talk of them, only when I'm questioned like."

"Do you know Mr. Ransome's mother?"

"Her that was here in April? Yes—she's no bigger than my sister's child who was eleven in December," she exclaimed, bursting into a laugh. "Such a bit of a woman, miss, you might hide her in a fish-kettle."

"Does she attempt to order you about when she comes here?"

"That she does, but *I* never mind her. I forgot to make her bed once, and she came running into the kitchen after lunch calling for me, and was in such a passion, I thought she'd go off in a fit. 'Oh, you wicked girl!' she says: 'Oh, you bad-hearted thing! how dare you neglect me?' she says. After she had stormed at me, she climbs upstairs again, and I heard her complaining to mistress, and just to make sure that she told no lies, I listened in the hall; and mistress says, 'My servants are engaged to wait upon me; if you want proper attendance, you may get it in a lodging.' This pleased me, for it served

the old lady right for abusing me for forgetfulness. Well, out flounced old Mrs. Ransome, and I had to hide behind the hat-stand to prevent her seeing of me; and ran upstairs calling, 'Saville! Saville!' meaning her son; and soon she comes down again, followed by the master, and then they both go to where the mistress was, and such a dreadful quarrel followed that I was quite scared, and went into the kitchen where the servants stood listening with white faces expecting I don't know what."

I was really too interested to silence her before she stopped of her own accord; but when she had done, my judgment stepped in and warned me against encouraging this quite unsuspected capacity of gossip which I had opened upon myself. I thereupon changed the subject, and shortly afterwards left the room for the kitchen, where I got into a very homely conversation with the cook upon prices, tradesmen, and such matters.

When I left the kitchen I went upstairs to my bedroom to unpack my box. There was nobody about, and I peeped into Mrs.

Ransome's bedroom when I passed it, where I saw, hanging on the left hand wall a half-length portrait, the size of life, of a gentleman in military uniform, the face fair-complexioned, the eyes brown, and the hair short. I had no difficulty in telling by the eyes alone that this was a near relative of Mrs. Ransome, if indeed it were not her father. Other pictures were around the room, chiefly of a devotional character. I was again struck by the luxuriousness of the furniture—the satin-covered sofa at the foot of the bed, the rich, pink-lined window drapery, the carpet that felt like piles of velvet beneath the foot, the elaborate bedstead, and the beautiful knick-knacks—smelling-bottles, ivory hand-glasses, &c.—upon the toilet-table. These things impressed me only so far as they contrasted with the plain furniture of the other rooms. They pointed, I thought, to a quality of selfishness which made the personal comfort of the occupant of the bedroom an affair of essential importance.

I reached my bedroom, and set to work to fill the chest of drawers, and give a look of habitation to the apartment. Whilst

my hands were busy, I constantly found my thoughts running on the gossip the housemaid had bestowed on me; but I must own that I found little to interest me in the mere narrative of quarrels, in the account of old Mrs. Ransome, and of her son's evil temper; what troubled me was, how long could I hope to hold my situation in a house where so much bad passion was rife, and where collisions of a most irritating nature might be of hourly occurrence? I was quite sure the place would suit me if Mr. and Mrs. Ransome would allow me to do my work without interfering with me; but I made up my mind not to submit a moment to any ill-usage.

Having finished with my box, I started upon an exploring expedition through the house. The servants' rooms were next to mine; I examined the women's and found them tidy enough, but Maddox's presented a most dissipated appearance. There was a pair of trousers under the bed, and a waistcoat in the fender, and by the bedside, on a chair, was a flat candlestick richly festooned with grease, and beside it a volume bound in sheepskin, which I examined, and dis-

covered to be "The Life and Adventures of Mr. Jeremiah Abershaw," with a horribly coarse woodcut for a frontispiece representing a gallows surrounded by a crowd eagerly observing a procession apparently emerging from a wall, the procession consisting of the Ordinary (labelled), Jack Ketch (labelled), some figures in the rear, and the Felon with his face turned to the mob, and a balloon coming out of his mouth inscribed "I die game!"

"Mr. Maddox keeps good company," I thought, and proceeded on my *tour d'inspection*, meaning presently to have a talk with my footman.

I reached the second landing where Mrs. Ransome's bedroom was, and knocked on the door facing hers. No answer; so I was about to turn the handle when the door flew open, and a gentleman dressed in a light suit presented himself. The moment I saw him I recognised him as the hot-headed individual who had travelled with me from London.

His dark eyes fastened themselves upon me with a look of surprise, and he exclaimed, "What do you want?"

"I beg your pardon," I replied, "I did not know you were in this room."

"Who are you?"

"Miss Ivory, the housekeeper."

"Oh, my wife's choice, aren't you?"

"Mrs. Ransome engaged me on Saturday."

"Why did you knock? does anybody want me?"

"No, sir; I was looking into the rooms merely to see how the servants did their work."

"Oh, I understand. And you are the new housekeeper, eh? my wife's choice, are you?"

He stared at me with his strange eyes, running them over my figure, and after a short silence said—

"Where have I seen you?"

That he should have had the smallest recollection of my face, considering that I had been one of a number and in no manner attracted his notice in the coach, showed that he possessed a good memory. But I was not going to help him, for the reason that he might take a prejudice to me for

having witnessed him make such a thorough donkey of himself.

"Where have I seen you?" he repeated.

"I think I meet you now, sir, in this house for the first time," I replied.

"I've seen you somewhere;" and he looked annoyed and frowned as he fixed his eyes on the ground.

I gave him a bow and turned away, but he stared after me until I was on the stairs, and then I heard him shut his door by slamming it to.

I had not seen enough of him yet to enable me to describe him fairly, but his blunt, unfortunate manner did not prevent me from thinking him a very good-looking man. His eyes were the most peculiar part of him, restless, glowing and black, the whites a darkish pearl-colour. His forehead was high, but the shape of his head was not good; the brows were narrow and the back of the head flat. I particularly noticed that he twitched his hands incessantly whilst he stood asking me questions, and he had the same nervous affection in his lower lip, which he would draw sideways and disclose

the teeth under his small black moustache. Another peculiarity; he invariably raised his voice in the beginning and sank it into a drawl at the end of a sentence. This might have seemed nothing but habitual indolence, as though a sentence tired his voice before he had done with it, had not the numberless suggestions of excitable activity which appeared in his gestures and manner flatly contradicted the idea. I chafed a little when I reflected on the imperious and offensive way in which he had asked me what I wanted, but tranquillized myself presently by allowing that I had annoyed him by breaking in upon his privacy and in a measure deserved his impatience.

I was resolved to carry out my programme, and the next room I came to was the drawing-room, the door of which was ajar. I peeped in, and seeing nobody advanced and gazed about me. This was undeniably the most charming room in the house, although here again the furniture was not nearly so costly as that in Mrs. Ransome's bedroom. There was a tall window facing the door, which led on to the lawn, and

more windows on the right, through which I could see a row of pillars. A stream of sunshine lay upon the carpet, and I approached the window through which it shone to draw down the blind.

Just then Mrs. Ransome came in.

"That's right, Miss Ivory," said she. "I am glad to see you so careful. Have you been over the house yet?"

"I am now going over it," I replied.

"Have you any fault to find with the servants?"

"No," I answered, not choosing to do Maddox an ill-turn before speaking to him.

"I can see that you will not require to be instructed in your work, and I am very glad of it, for reasons you can guess from what I have already said. Your experience will always enable you to remember who the mistress of this house is. My last housekeeper's ignorance on this point was, as I have told you, the cause of my dismissing her."

Why this extraordinary jealousy of her position? It seemed to me that she would better consult her dignity by insisting less upon her mistressship.

"When my father lived here," she con-

tinued, "we used always to occupy this room; but we chiefly use the dining-room now; and I would not use that if I could help it. I would lock up the house and save it for its real owner, my father—do you hear, Miss Ivory? He gave it to me, but I don't wish to keep it, and should like to be a beggar!"

She made this singular speech with her eyes flashing as they rested upon mine. Her frankness surprised me; there was a want of dignity in it which I could not reconcile with her haughty bearing. Could she not reserve her complaints for an equal?

She may have read my thoughts, for she drew close to me and exclaimed, throwing her handsome obstinate face back—

"I don't know how long you may stop with me, Miss Ivory—perhaps a year—perhaps a week: but though you should remain no longer than a day, you are certain to find out the secret of this house, and you shall learn the truth from me at once, before your mind is poisoned by falsehoods. Answer me a question: Did the Campions speak of me?"

"Yes, madam."

"What did they say?"

I would not tell her what they said for many reasons, so I answered—

"They spoke of you as wanting a housekeeper, and suggested if I applied that I might obtain the situation."

"I don't mean that," she exclaimed, impatiently. "Did they speak of my husband and me?"

"I scarcely remember," I stammered; really confounded by this examination.

"I ask you because, when Mrs. Ransome was here, she did not scruple to go about telling the most wilful falsehoods of me. Thanks to her and her son I have lost my friends, my house is shunned, and though I can prove nothing, I know that my character has been atrociously misrepresented."

She stamped her foot and frowned, but not more from temper than from an effort to repress her tears.

"Although I cannot pretend to remember accurately what the Campions said," I replied, "I can assure you that not a syllable was breathed by either of them that did no

flatter your character, and make me eager to serve under you."

She watched me distrustfully, then sighed bitterly, and murmured—

"It *must* be so! How can I have such grief and not speak it? I am friendless—those who would serve me are afraid to hear me—my own poor father dare not come to me. Oh, my God! if I knew how to end it!"

She put her hands to her face and burst into tears. Her grief seemed to bring her to my level, and to justify me in offering her my sympathy. But what could I say? I knew nothing of her sorrow, nor would my own self-imposed rigid training suffer me to endure the thought of permitting the removal, for a moment, of our distinctions, by attempting to soothe her. I stood irresolute and silent, listening to her sobs, and wondering how much of the grief that racked her was of her own making.

Suddenly Mr. Ransome came into the room. He entered quickly, walked right up to us, and stood for some seconds fronting his wife and staring at her before she was conscious of his presence.

"What now?" he exclaimed.

At the sound of his voice her hands dropped from her face, she drew herself slowly erect, looking at him from foot to head with an indescribable expression of scorn in her eyes, then wheeled sharply about from him. Contempt was never more fiercely expressed than in this quick action.

"What is your name?" he said to me; "I forget it."

"Miss Ivory,"

"What has my wife been saying to you, Miss Ivory?"

"That is my business," she exclaimed, turning upon him. "Miss Ivory, leave the room if you please."

I hurried away, only too glad to make my escape; but before I reached the door Mr. Ransome called out—

"Stop!"

"Go!" cried his wife. "Miss Ivory, remember who is mistress here."

"I insist upon your answering my question," he exclaimed, coming to the table.

I looked from one to the other of them; they were both watching me with passionate

eyes ; one or the other was to be obeyed ; I ranged myself with the weaker side, reckless of consequences.

"I was engaged by Mrs. Ransome, and am bound to consider her my mistress. I therefore obey her orders." And out I went.

She came after me and caught my arm when I was in the hall.

"Miss Avory, I shall not forget your courage," she said in a feverish whisper. "Thank you !"

IV.

I gained my private room in the basement, and was thankful to find it empty. I threw myself into a chair with a mind as weary and upset as if I had been engaged for hours in violently quarrelling. These people, from what I had heard, had been married two years. Two years ago they were making love in Rose Farm, standing hand-in-hand in the porch, while Mrs. Campion watched them as they whispered, and thought, to use her own expression, "that they must be dying of love." And

now they were living the life of cat and dog, and behaving as though not even a memory of their love survived in them to give some sort of dignity to their mutual hate. I had not been in the house three hours, and yet more had been revealed to me than I should have expected to hear and see in a twelvemonth. Since they were so miserable together, why did not her father take her away and keep her with him? What was at the bottom of these quarrels—Temper? Jealousy on one side or the other? Had the precious idol that love had reared been found the veriest plaster of Paris?

I sat in this room which, to distinguish it, I will for the future call my room, moralizing and speculating until I had recovered my composure, and then, wondering if they were still quarrelling upstairs, I went to the door and listened, but all was quiet.

Maddox was in the pantry cleaning the plate. I called to him, and he came to my room, holding a spoon in one hand and a piece of washleather in the other. He was a wiry man, about as tall as Mr. Ransome,

and bating the moustache, not unlike his master in his complexion, the shape of his nose, and the length of his jawbones. His hair was dark brown, his eyes the same colour, sly, shrewd, and vigilant. They twinkled when he stood before me. He had an idea, I suspect, that I was going to pump him about his master.

“I went into your bedroom just now,” I said, “and found it in a disgraceful state. When you have finished cleaning the plate, go and fold up your clothes—I should be ashamed to ask the housemaid to do it for you—and pray give me no further chance of detecting your slovenliness. Do you read in bed?”

He was staggered by my address; his eyes ceased to twinkle, and his mouth slowly opened.

“Read in bed?” he echoed.

“Yes. There is a greasy candlestick on a chair close to your pillow, and a book near it which, were Mr. Ransome to see it, he would order you to burn.”

“Burn!” he exclaimed, trying to become indignant. “I should like to see any one burn it. It’s my book, and that’s my bed-

room, and it's law for a man to do wot he likes with his own. And if I choose to keep awake all night, and beguile the time with reading, wot's that to you, mem?"

"We'll see," I answered calmly, for Maddox was by no means the first footman I had had to deal with; "if you like to hide that book in your box, you may; but if I find it by your bedside again I shall take it to Mr. Ransome, and ask him if it is his wish that works of that kind should be introduced into his house. You had better do what I tell you; I never argue with servants I am hired to control. Do your work properly, keep your bedroom in order, and we shall get on; but be quite sure that no impertinence will check my interference when I find things going wrong; and I consider that things are going very wrong when I learn that the footman sleeps with a lighted candle and a book about thieves against his pillow, and leaves his master's clothes heaped about the fender."

"I don't know what you refers to, mem," said he, doing his best to speak with lordly contempt; "but master's clothes are in his

wardrobe, and not in the fender, if, mem, you'll be pleased to look for yourself."

"The waistcoat in the fender belongs to your livery. Do you find yourself in clothes, or is your livery paid for by your master?"

"Oh, I see your meaning!" he exclaimed, tossing his head, but looking at me very angrily; "and it does you very great credit, mem, to be so hobservant of your betters' interest. And I hope, mem," he continued, edging towards the door, "for your betters' sake, as you'll go on as you've begun, and not deceive of their expectations," he said, gaining the passage, "by turning out worse nor them as you've pleased to abuse. And hI'm blowed——" His voice died away in a growl, and presently I heard him hissing over the plate in the pantry with great ferocity, and intermingling his sibillation with angry exclamations, to which I paid no more attention than I did to the flies that buzzed about the ceiling.

I had but one object in addressing him; I wished him to understand that I thoroughly knew my place, and that no excuse, such as the indifference of the

master and mistress to the doings of their servants, would divert me from my duty. I judged that in a house where the heads were perpetually quarrelling that there would be insubordination, perfunctoriness, and bad habits; and if my situation was to be at all endurable, it was clear that I must at once set to work to correct every error that I encountered, and let the kitchen comprehend that the controlling powers which had been entrusted to me would be as rigorously exercised as if Gardenhurst were my own property, and its interests mine.

But that first day of my arrival was not yet ended. At half-past two Maddox came to my room to lay the cloth for my dinner. He snuffed through his nose as he slid round the table and slapped the knives and forks down angrily, and now and again I caught him glancing at me morosely out of the corners of his eyes.

"What will you be pleased to drink?" he inquired with an air of frigid obsequiousness.

I told him ale.

"Oh, I thought you might hev been a

water-drinker," he observed, evidently intending to be cuttingly sarcastic.

How was it that I could not think of him but with reference to his volume on Jerry Abershaw? The gallows, the procession, the crowd of that coarse frontispiece always came into my head when I looked at him, and I wished, to save the prejudice that had grown in me and that had really nothing to do with his behaviour, that I had not found that book in his bedroom.

There was nothing for me to do about the house that afternoon; so I told the housemaid, named Mary, to give me the work she had been upon in the morning, and spent an hour in sewing.

My room was not a cheerful one. The window facing the avenue was sunk below the ground, and the grass upon the cutting was long and obscured the light. A great linen closet occupied the whole of one side; there was also an old-fashioned safe for the plate, a clock with a hoarse tick on the mantelpiece, some prints, a couple of wooden armchairs, and a big glass case

containing a number of shelves loaded with handsome crockery.

It was nearly four o'clock when I heard a quick step descending the kitchen staircase, and a moment after, my door was pushed open and Mr. Ransome stepped in.

I put down my work and rose. There was a wandering expression in his eyes as he surveyed me some seconds before addressing me; his face was pale and he held his hands behind him.

"Will you be good enough to tell me your name?" he said. "It's always going out of my head."

"Miss Ivory, sir."

"Ivory—Ivory—Ivory—Ivory—very well! now I'll remember. Sit down—you needn't stand."

I seated myself.

"Who told you to obey my wife before me, Miss Ivory?" he continued, twitching his mouth oddly, and shifting the weight of his body first on one leg and then on the other.

"No one, sir."

"Then when I told you in the drawing-room to stop, why didn't you stop?"

"I obeyed the first command that I received," I answered, controlling as best I could the nervousness his curious eyes inspired.

"Did she tell you not to obey my orders?"

"If you mean Mrs. Ransome—certainly not, sir."

He looked at me angrily, and exclaimed—

"How the deuce do I know that you are speaking the truth?"

I coloured up at this ugly speech, and bit my lip. He saved me from speaking the sharp answer that was on my tongue by saying—

"Are you a trustworthy person? Have you ever been housekeeper before?"

"Mrs. Ransome has received my character. I have been housekeeper fourteen years to various families."

"Are you a lady by birth?"

"Sir," I answered, warmly, "my origin has nothing to do with my duties. If I serve you properly my birth cannot matter."

"Come, madam, I desire no airs. My reason for making these inquiries is to

learn whether you are a proper person to confide in. Let me hear whether you can keep a secret or not."

"I would rather not know any secrets, sir."

"Look here," he exclaimed, holding up his hand, "do you give me to understand that you would rather believe my wife than me?"

"I am afraid, sir, I do not understand you."

He looked cautiously towards the door and closed it. He then returned to me, approaching me so close that I shrunk back in my chair, while my heart began to beat quickly, and I felt myself grow pale. He bent his face forward and whispered—

"My wife is mad!"

When he had said this he drew himself erect, frowned, and stood watching me with his arms folded. I stared at him with astonishment.

"That's the secret," he went on, drawing a chair to the table and seating himself; "and now you can understand why I asked you if you were trustworthy."

Whether he spoke the truth, or whether

he himself was mad and thought his wife so, I couldn't yet tell; but to judge from what I had seen of both their conducts I think, had my opinion been asked, I should have pronounced them both mad.

"Follow me, if you please," he resumed, holding up his hand with one finger extended. "All mad people are cunning. Madness begins first in hallucinations accompanied by violent outbreaks of temper. This is my wife's case. She imagines herself both master and mistress in this house, speaks of me, her lawful husband, as an intruder, and is for ever threatening to lock up this house and go forth into the world as a pauper. What is this but madness? Is it sanity? You look a clear-headed woman—answer me."

"I cannot venture to give an opinion until I have seen more of Mrs. Ransome," I answered, utterly confounded by the man.

"But you have seen something of her."

"Yes, sir."

"What was she talking to you about when I interrupted her conversation in the drawing-room?"

I could find no reply to make. One of his feet beat softly.

"Was she not insisting upon her being sole mistress here, and cautioning you against obeying anybody else's command?"

I dared not, with his glaring eyes upon me, remain silent. I answered, yes.

"Ha!" he exclaimed triumphantly, springing up and resting his hand upon the back of the chair. "Continue—recite me all that conversation."

"Sir, I beg you not to press me; there was nothing in that conversation which would interest you to hear."

"Did she talk of locking up this house?"

"She meant——"

"Answer me," he cried, harshly.

"Yes," I said, my reply wrung from me by the fear his manner had renewed.

His manner softened, he lowered his head and said in a gentle voice—

"Miss Avory, I entreat you not to attend to what she says. She is mad, poor girl, on this subject of mastership—nay, on other subjects; but this is the central hallucination round which other delusions cluster. She thinks my temper passionate; but she

herself is all passion, and confounds my remarks with her own wild speeches. Her madness takes the form of extraordinary aversions. There is my mother—a harmless, tender-hearted old lady—my poor wife hates her. The sight of her, nay, the name of her, flings her into a fury. Has she spared you? Wait awhile. I only ask you that, when by some innocent action or speech you have kindled her passion, bear with her. Remember *how* she is afflicted: but never heed her calumnies, her temper, her wild, ungovernable wishes.”

He raised his forefinger mysteriously, smiled softly, bowed with singular grace and quitted the room.

The manner of his leaving me gave to his words a significance that utterly deceived me. There had been sense and tenderness in his final words, and these taken with the precision with which he had counted off his wife’s “delusions,” thoroughly disposed me to believe that Mrs. Ransome *was* mad. His statement was not to be weakened by recollection of his behaviour in the coach, by his rude and even insolent manner to me, by my sincere doubts even of his own

sanity. I had to consider that what he had said of his wife was true; that she *had* insisted upon my recognising her sole authority; that she *had* declared her wish to lock up the house; that she *had* implied her husband was something very much worse than an intruder, and that she abhorred her mother-in-law. Were these things signs of madness? Why, yes, if I put myself in his place, and argued with a presumption of her madness; if I considered that the temper that was shown was always on her side, and that her grievances were entirely imaginary. As yet I could not suppose otherwise. But what could I know of the truth in the short time I had been in the house? *His* behaviour might mean no more than an offensive mannerism; but hers, so much at least as I had seen of it, was better to be explained by madness than any other reason I could assign to it.

Determining not to allow my mind to dwell upon these matters until I was able to form a definite opinion of them, I went into the kitchen where the cook was getting ready the dinner. Maddox had been rung

struck upon my ear and obliged me to take them in."

"What did he say?" asked the cook, who was 'bursting with curiosity.

"Why," said the footman, quickly, so as to prevent my silencing him, and giving me an extravagantly cunning leer as he spoke, "he told Miss Ivory as mistress was mad."

He laughed, hummed a tune through his teeth, and while I was striving to find fit words for the indignation that possessed me, walked slowly out of the kitchen.

"Mistress mad!" cried the cook. "That I don't believe."

"Nor I!" exclaimed both housemaids together.

"No more mad," continued the cook, warmly, "than I am. But I'll tell you what she is, Miss; she's a ill-used woman, and I don't care a farden if master hears me say so!" she cried, polishing a soup-plate with great excitement.

"That footman," I exclaimed energetically, "must have a very mean nature. I wonder what Mr. Ransome would say if I told him that his man listened to his private conversation with me."

"He'd kick him," said one of the housemaids.

"It wouldn't be the first time," said the other.

"Such languidge," continued the housemaid who had first spoken, "as goes on between them two sometimes of a morning, I never heard the likes of. It's enough to make one downright wicked to listen to it."

"Only think of the sinfulness of calling mistress mad! poor dear lady who was as happy as the days were long when she lived with her father, a perfect gentleman, and his wife a sweet lady who had a kind word for every one," cried the cook, who was clearly her mistress's partisan.

"We have no right to talk of these things," I said. "You have only the footman's word to go by, and the word of a man who can listen to a private conversation is not to be taken on oath." And I ended the subject by starting Mary on an errand, and recommending the cook to look to her joint.

The rest of the day passed without my seeing either Mr. or Mrs. Ransome again. The young mistress dined alone, which I

learnt was much more the rule than the exception. Mary gave me this piece of information when she brought me my tea, but I offered her no encouragement to talk.

After tea I went upstairs to the bedrooms, where I lingered awhile, and returned to my room not having met Mrs. Ransome. I thought she must feel very lonely upstairs, and wondered how she managed to get through the time, if she amused herself no better than she had amused herself that day.

I inquired of the cook, who came to ask me a question, if Mrs. Ransome played the piano.

"Why, yes, Miss," she answered. "Mary, who's been here longest of any, says she plays and sings beautifully; but I've not heard the piano since I've been in the house, an' that'll be getting on for four months."

"I suppose she passes her time in reading."

"I am sure that's more than I can tell you. She's a poor lonely lady for certain, and I can't get what that Maddox said out

of my mind. I know who's the mad one of them two."

This reference silenced me, and the cook withdrew. At ten o'clock the footman passed my room bearing a tray containing water and glasses. He went upstairs, and shortly after I heard the sound of excited voices which came out through the dining-room door that Maddox had opened. I could not distinguish the words that were spoken, but the voices belonged to Mr. and Mrs. Ransome, and of the two, hers was decidedly the loudest and most impetuous. They were hushed on Maddox closing the door. When he came downstairs, I said—

"Has Mr. Ransome returned?"

"Yes, he hev, mem."

"What time do the servants go to bed?"

"Half-past ten," he answered shortly, and scarcely able to address me civilly.

"Does Mr. Ransome lock the house up?"

"No, mem, he don't; specially when he doesn't come in all night."

I told him he could go; and presently a bell rang violently, and after awhile Mary came to tell me that Mistress was going to

bed, and wished me to see that the doors were fastened, and the lights out before I went to my room.

I asked the cook to accompany me, lest I should overlook a door; and when the other servants were out of the kitchen, we went upstairs and locked the hall-doors, and closed the drawing-room windows, and then entered the dining-room, where the windows were wide open. The smell of tobacco-smoke was still strong in the room, and I looked into the little balcony that stood a foot or two above the lawn to make sure that Mr. Ransome was not smoking there. There were some bottles on the table with the corks out, and a man's hat on the sofa. Whilst I placed the bottles in the sideboard I looked about me for signs to suggest how Mrs. Ransome had spent the evening. But there were no books, and no work-table or basket, and in the absence of these I could only conclude that she had sat with her hands before her.

"Strange," said the cook in a whisper, "what pleasure master can have in going out an' leaving his wife alone. It isn't as if there was theaytres, and the likes of that

to entice him. He does nothing but walk. The milkman told me the other morning that he was coming to Copsford by the Dawling road at half-past nine at night, and who should pass him, walking all by himself, but Mr. Ransome."

"He certainly chooses odd hours for his excursions," I replied; "will you close that window, cook? Thank you."

I extinguished the lamp, and there being no other room to look to, bade the cook good-night and went to bed. The night was sultry. The moon was in the south, and the hills under it were black, but its silver light lay pale in some of the valleys. I went to the open window to breathe the air. So deep was the silence that I could hear the wheels of a vehicle upon the London road away down on my left, in the further valley, which was a mile off. Some big clouds resembling motionless volumes of steam hung overhead, and presently one of them approached the moon, and then the fine white light that floated in a silvery haze over the land, went out, and the outlines of the hills were swallowed up in the darkness.

I was about to leave the window when I heard a woman's voice exclaim—

“If you knew how hateful the sight of your face is to me, you would never come near me?”

A man's voice answered, but the tones were smothered, and I could not catch the words.

My first impression was that the speakers were below on the lawn; and I stretched my head out of the window to see them. A faint atmosphere of light was reflected from the window exactly under me, and, recalling the situation of the apartment I was in, I at once perceived that the room under mine was Mrs. Ransome's bedroom. Her window was open; she must have stood near it to enable me to hear her so distinctly.

“My father!” I heard her exclaim; “how dare you mention his name? He hated you from the first. He knew you were a madman, and I should have known it too, but you deceived me with your madman's cunning — lonely, miserable creature that I am! But he *shall* know—he *shall* know though it break his heart,

for I cannot go on enduring this terrible life."

His answer was still inaudible, but he had evidently drawn nearer to the window, for I clearly remarked the emphasis of savage contempt in the tone of his voice.

"Keep away from me!" I heard her cry. "You want to drive me mad, and you shall be answerable for what I do in my madness. Why do you come to my room?—no, not one word! not one word!—but tomorrow she shall know more—take your hand off!" she cried with a half-suppressed shriek. "Oh, coward! coward!" There was a trampling of feet for a moment, a low fierce laugh, and a door was banged. Then followed a profound stillness, presently disturbed by sounds of piteous sobbing.

I had listened without a moment's reflection that I was acting dishonourably in doing so. This thought could not occur amid the intense agitation which these unintelligible words, the startling shriek, the pitiful after-sobbing had excited in me. I shrunk away from the window with my heart beating wildly, my hands cold as

death, my forehead damp with perspiration. For many minutes I stood near the toilet-table listening for further sounds with strained and painful attention, but soon the sobs died out and I heard the window closed.

What horrible quarrels were these? Was I in a madhouse? Such sounds, and above all, that strange fierce laugh, by whomsoever uttered, would seem only possible in a lunatic asylum. Long after I had heard her close the window, I found myself still standing and listening. My hands trembled violently when I began to undress myself, and the looking-glass reflected a face as white as a sheet. It was one o'clock before I fell asleep, and throughout my slumbers that horrible laugh, that half-suppressed shriek, mixed their wild part in my dreams, and made my repose more unrefreshing than had I lain sleepless in my bed.

V.

The sunshine awoke me; it was seven o'clock. The morning was glorious, the

birds sang loudly from the trees, and numberless butterflies hovered about the rich flower-beds, and gave life to the bright verdure of the lawn.

The moment I recalled the quarrel of the night I became as agitated and nervous as if the conversation I had heard had passed but five minutes before. The servants were busy in the rooms downstairs when I descended, and I found Maddox in his shirtsleeves cleaning the dining-room windows. He bestowed a sour glance upon me as I stood for a moment watching him, but made no response to my good morning.

I did my best to abstract my mind from the unpleasant memory that haunted it by going busily about my work; and at eight o'clock went to breakfast. Mary had prepared my table, and when I sat down she lingered at the door and said—

“Did you hear anything last night, Miss?”

“Why do you ask?”

“I only thought, as you sleep over mistress's bedroom, that you might have been frightened, being new to the ways, if you *was* disturbed.”

"Did *you* hear anything?"

"Oh!" she exclaimed with a shrug, "we're always hearing something."

I was anxious to know if the quarrel I had overheard was unusual. If the thing was frequent I might take courage and compose my nerves.

"What do you hear?" I inquired.

"Why, the most dreadful quarrels between master and mistress. It's enough to turn one's blood cold to hear 'em sometimes. What with him with his laughs, and her with her screams, it's truly awful."

"Then these quarrels often take place?"

"Ay, pretty near as often as they are together. I ought to know, for I act as lady's-maid to mistress; and sometimes of a mornin', when I'm doing her hair, if master comes in, the words between 'em so scares me that I often don't know whether I'm standing on my head or my heels."

"How long have these quarrels been going on?"

"Oh, for a good while now. They're *his* fault mind you, Miss. He *do* say the most outrageous things; and once——"

"And once what?"

"Once he caught her by the hair and clenched his fist, and made as though he would hit her on the face."

"Is it possible!" I exclaimed. "Why doesn't her father interfere? Why doesn't she leave him?"

"Oh, she's been going to leave him ever so many times to my certain knowledge. But there's a wonderful deal of pride in her. You see, Miss, if she was to go in for a divorce all the truth would come out, and everybody would be talking of her. An' as to leaving him—well, I don't know anything about that. Her father hasn't any idea of what she has to go through. I heard her tell master she'd rather die than that the Colonel should learn what a dreadful mistake she had made in marrying of such a man. But he must have seen a good deal when he was here; quite enough to make him understand that his daughter was the reverse of happy."

As I had heard all I felt disposed to learn from her, I told her she might now leave me and go about her work. Although servants are not very veracious sources of information, I did not doubt that what Mary

had told me was substantially correct; and I might now console myself with reflecting that in spite of the cry and the laugh that still rang in my ears, there had been nothing more tragically significant in the quarrel I had overheard than in any other of the quarrels which were perpetually occurring. But surely, I thought to myself, these are scenes that must soon come to an end. Mrs. Ransome's piteous reference to her loneliness and misery, her wild cry, "I cannot go on leading this terrible life," should lead me to conclude that any near day would find her home broken up, herself seeking her father's protection. I could not doubt that there had been too much real anguish in her voice last night to mislead me on this point. What had forced that shriek from her? that bitter exclamation, "Oh, coward! coward!" Had he struck her? The thought sent the blood tingling through my veins.

I was afraid, should he remember that I slept over his wife's bedroom, he might suppose I had overheard the quarrel and would seek me with some fierce explanation. I therefore kept to the lower part of the

house to avoid reminding him of my existence by meeting him, until I heard one of the servants say that he had gone out.

I asked if Mrs. Ransome had breakfasted, but was told that she had not yet left her room. It was then nearly ten o'clock. I was going upstairs when I met Mary coming through the hall.

"Oh, if you please, mistress wants you. She's in her bedroom."

"Alone."

"Yes, Miss."

The girl's manner was strange though I scarcely noticed it at the time. She hurried off when she had made her answer as though she wished to avoid further questioning.

I found Mrs. Ransome reclining on the sofa at the foot of her bed. A tray was on a little table at her side with some tea and dry toast. She had on a handsome dressing-gown which was unbuttoned at the neck and displayed the exceeding whiteness and purity of her skin. But her face was so miserably pale as to quite qualify the effect of her beauty. She turned her eyes about with slow, weary movements, and kept her left

or not," she continued, a sudden light coming into her eyes, "you shall know the truth. You have already heard a terrible falsehood—I have called you here expressly to tell you how infamous is the lie my husband told you about me yesterday morning."

"This is Mary's doing!" I thought to myself. Now what mischief was that girl's wretched love of gossip about to occasion?

"I paid no attention to what he said," I replied.

"Oh yes, you did!—reflect! when he told you I was mad, you thought he spoke the truth."

"Why should you think this?" I exclaimed, not the less conscience-stricken because there was something in her manner now, that convinced me of the profound wrong I had done her in harbouring a moment's doubt of her sanity.

"Pray answer me!" she cried, shaking off her languor, and eyeing me with jealous eagerness. "Did you not believe him?"

"No, I will not go so far. I considered his assertion barely probable, only."

"Because of my temper yesterday? be-

cause of my blurting out my grief almost at our first meeting?"

"Yes, madam."

"But do you think me mad *now*, because I wish to remove from your mind the horrible suspicion my husband's words created?"

"Certainly not. I would only ask, taking my humble position into consideration, why my opinions should in any way be of the least importance to you?"

She started from the sofa and stepped across the room, holding her dressing-gown tightly about her, by folding her arms on her bosom.

"I cannot explain," she said, stopping and looking at me from the end of the room. "I do not sometimes understand myself. When my mind is full, my thoughts will find utterance, and I cannot help myself. But do I humiliate myself by wishing you to know the truth?"

"I should have found it out soon, madam."

"No; you mistake!" she cried, passionately. "He would have won you over, and it is agony to me to feel that his

cunning can make people think that all the wrong is on my side."

She came close to me, pulled the sleeve of her dressing-gown above her elbow, and exposed her bare arm.

"Look at those marks!" she said, through her compressed lips. "They were made by his fingers last night. Did you hear me cry out? you sleep overhead—you should have heard me."

There were five small livid marks upon her arm just above her elbow, and where they were the arm was swollen.

"I heard you cry out," I answered, turning my eyes away from the ugly marks, and feeling myself turn pale.

"Who would believe," she moaned, adjusting her sleeve, "that he is the savage he is? I was awake all last night with the pain in this elbow. My father would shoot him if he knew how he treats me."

"Why do you not go to your father?" I exclaimed. "Mr. Ransome is too dangerous a man for any woman to live with."

She made no answer at once, but resumed her seat on the sofa, and leant her cheek on her hand.

"If I leave him," she said, speaking in the tone of one who thinks aloud, "I must abandon my old home, the home my dear father loves, and I must own that I was guilty of a miserable sin in loving him." She stopped and looked at me. "Miss Avory, the story of my marriage is a long one. The telling of it would show you that my father abhorred the thought of my becoming Mr. Ransome's wife, and that I was madly obstinate and deaf and blind to signs in the man which my instincts perceived and warned me against. How I advocated him! how I strove against my father to save the sensitiveness I thought he possessed! How I proved, knowing all the time that my father's misgivings were merely sterner forms of my own secret doubts, that he was sweet-tempered, manly, upright, generous, and a gentleman! Can I unsay all this to my father? Above all," she cried, "shall I allow my husband to drive me from my own home and make me a subject of the gossip which my father detests?"

These words explained everything to me.

Had she spent hours over the narrative she could not have made me see the story of

her marriage more clearly. The indignation the sight of her arm had raised in me, had forced me into offering her one piece of advice; but now that my temper had cooled I would not take it upon myself to express any further opinion unless challenged to do so. Her frankness astonished me; but it did not render our relative positions the less defined nor offer justification for any expression or behaviour on my part that should not be in perfect consonance with the situation I filled in her household.

“Can you understand me?” she continued, softening her voice, and speaking with one of the saddest smiles I ever saw on the human countenance. “It is easy to advise husband and wife to separate, but who but a wife can appreciate the humiliation, the misery, the lonesomeness that horrible alternative involves? Do not mistake me! I hate my husband—ah, God help me! I am a wretched sinner to say this: but he has made me hate him. If *he* only should prove the sufferer, I would separate from him this day. But I think of my poor father—the shame of it! . . . my hand shall not do it! the child whom he

loved and honoured must not break his heart!"

She sobbed and pressed a handkerchief to her eyes angrily. "He knows that I am unhappy, but he does not know *how* unhappy. I could not help his finding out much of the truth when he came to see me. I did not want him to come. I dreaded the discovery he was bound to make; but I dared not urge him to stop away, for that would have told him too much. In no letter of mine has he ever read a single line that would make him think I was the miserable woman I am. There is a secret he suspects, but is not sure of. Must I tell it you? My husband is mad! Miss Ivory, tell me—you know this?"

"I should conclude he was, if on no other evidence than those marks on your arm."

"But when he told you *I* was mad, did you not guess the truth about him?"

"Indeed, madam, I was bewildered—I have had no time for reflection—I am so great a stranger to you—I so little anticipated these disclosures——"

She raised her head haughtily.

"There it is, Miss Ivory. You are like

the rest of the world—discreet. The life I am compelled to lead, which every morning brings to me regularly, you are afraid to hear. You feel that safety lies in ignorance.”

“You wrong me,” I exclaimed, flushing up. “I am pained but not frightened. Your experiences are very new to me. If I knew how to help you—with the deepest respect I say so—there is little you could command which you would find me unwilling to perform. But I trust I have sense enough to perceive that yours is one of those cases in which the sufferer must help himself. No good wishes, no advice, no interference can be of use. Your reason for not leaving your home, that you may not give pain to Colonel Kilmain, does honour to your heart as a child; what purpose could be served by my urging you to weigh your present unhappiness against the unhappiness your leaving your husband would cause your father? You would still be guided by your own judgment, and my arguments by being impracticable would become officious.”

“You speak reasonably,” she answered, thoughtfully: “but I beg, Miss Ivory, that you will not let me feel that I have acted

foolishly in speaking of my troubles to you. I have been forced into these disclosures. Yesterday morning, before I sent for you, my husband had cruelly insulted me. My bitterness lay close to my lips. I could not help giving vent to it. It tormented me all day, and when I saw you again in the drawing-room, I was impelled, I could not silence myself, to speak to you as I did. But when I heard that my husband had represented me as a madwoman to you, I felt that I should go mad indeed if I did not instantly send for you and speak as I have done. No, I regret nothing! Judge me not! As I live, I am the most miserable woman in the world!"

She flung up her hands and burst into a passion of tears. There was something very piteous in the spectacle of her wild grief. I knelt by her side and took her hand, and endeavoured to soothe her; but many minutes passed before her tears ceased, and then she leaned back on her couch with her handkerchief pressed to her face sobbing convulsively.

Her words, her grief, the injury done to her arm, had completely won me over to her

side, had obliterated all memory of the disagreeable impression she had left on me the day before, and had opened my eyes to the character of the man she had married. And now that my sympathy was with her, I found all those actions which I had been prepared to assume as illustrations of a disordered mind, perfectly consistent, womanly and spirited. This man and his mother should not drive her from the home her father had given her ; and hence her jealous passionate determination to be obeyed as the mistress. I could feel surprised no longer by her opening her heart to me ere I had been an hour in her house, now that she had shown me what mad and bitter impulses her husband's treatment might set working in her breast.

She let fall her handkerchief presently, and sat up ; whereupon I rose from her side and stood near the door.

"Thank you for your patience and attention," she said, in her rich, low, tremulous voice. "I will promise to shock you no more with my troubles. I only beg you to remember how events, which were out of the power of either of us to control, have forced

you into the ungrateful position of confidante."

"Not ungrateful, Mrs. Ransome."

"Oh yes: you are no young talkative girl, thirsting to find out home-secrets that you may be wiser than your neighbours. I suppose the servants constantly speak of these quarrels."

"You must expect that," I replied.

"My husband is wholly to blame—were I on my deathbed I should say that. He takes a vile pleasure in insulting me for the sole purpose of exciting my temper, and then he finds an excuse for his own mad passion, and you may hear him laughing in his rage, as though the quarrels he creates between us were his sole enjoyment. Why, Miss Ivory, all this is nothing but a madman's paltry scheme of revenge. My father was cold to him, and never scrupled to let him know how averse he was from our engagement. The mother never forgot that. She has taught him to recal it as a bitter insult—and the coward avenges himself on me!"

"You should not allow the mother to enter the house."

"I cannot prevent her. They are two to one."

"But you have friends who would take the responsibility of advising your husband upon themselves."

"Not one!" she answered, with a little stamp of her foot. "The one dear friend I had, Dr. Redcliffe, died; I have no others. One by one the people who were visitors here, when my father and I lived together, have stopped calling. I may have some secret sympathizers, but there is not one I would deign to tell my troubles to, for there is not one who would not shrink from interfering—and interference can do no good. Miserable and helpless as I am!" she exclaimed, her eyes kindling, "I will still fight my own battles. These horrible days *must* end!—only what pride I have remaining will not endure that he should misrepresent me. *You* know the truth now. Oh, I have been keeping you standing. Pray forgive me. I need not detain you longer. Thank you again for your patience."

She forced a smile and lay back on the sofa. I opened the door and quitted the

room with spirits as much depressed as if I had endured some painful personal trouble.

VI.

So far I have closely related the particulars of my first day's residence at Gardenhurst. Much of my story lies packed in that first day and in the morning which followed it, and there was scarcely an incident that did not bear directly upon the singular issue towards which we were blindly pressing.

But I can now for awhile afford to be less minute ; and the brief review of a few days will fitly serve as an introduction to the most extraordinary portion of this story.

After I had left Mrs. Ransome I devoted much thought to what she had told me ; and, with no doubt in my mind as to her perfect sanity, furnished forth the history of her married life in this form : That the grounds on which Colonel Kilmain had based his dislike to the marriage were, his suspicion of the soundness of Mr. Ransome's reason : That his daughter, blinded by love, had adhered obstinately to her resolution to

marry him : That for some months his insanity lay hidden or quiet, and then took a positive character ; and that now, after a year and a half or longer, of daily, subtle growth, his madness had ended in exciting her bitterest hate. I speculated upon the nature of the madness whose actions were too sane to qualify the abhorrence they excited by pity for the affliction that produced them. There should, I thought, be deep malice and great cunning mixed up in the insanity that could induce no other emotion in the sane mind than scorn and rage. For instance, any wildness, any want of logic in Mr. Ransome's insults would blunt their barbs by representing them as expressions of an irresponsible mind. Misery, not hate, would follow these outbursts. Mad he undoubtedly was : but, I assumed, with such a leaning to reason that the consistency of his language would render it as detestable to her as if his brain were as healthy as her own.

I saw very little of him. He was out nearly all day, and then the house was quiet. Three days after my arrival I was in the grounds when I met him, at the very bottom where the trees were, and where I had been

sauntering for ten minutes past. He came out from among the trees with his eyes bent down, humming a tune. Could I have hidden I should have done so. I will plainly own that I was afraid of him. He stared doubtfully at me, and then his eyes sank, and then he stared again. It struck me that my gaze embarrassed him, but I attached no significance to the fancy; nor did I look at him sufficiently long at a time to satisfy myself on this point.

"Well," he exclaimed, standing still, "has my wife insulted you yet?"

"No, sir," I answered.

"Ha!" he said, holding up his finger, and looking cunningly, but not at me, "you remember what I told you and are humouring her, eh?"

I could not say yes, and I was too frightened to say no, so I forced a smile which I hoped he would interpret according to his wishes.

"Pass on!" he exclaimed, frowning and motioing me towards the trees. "You are one of those ladies whom the dumb devils are fond of."

He stepped out of my way and stood with

his hands hanging down. I pressed forward with a beating heart, not knowing how mad he really might be, and considering that the least show of obstinacy would be the most foolhardy exhibition I could at that moment indulge in. When I was well among the trees I peeped over my shoulder and saw him standing where I had left him. When he caught me looking he turned quickly on his heel and hurried away. This action, of which I afterwards understood the import, merely seemed to me a part of his general extraordinary behaviour.

Again, on the following day I met him in the hall, as he was leaving the house. His manner was very different. He smiled, asked me if I did not admire the surrounding country, and after one or two civilly-expressed remarks, bowed with the utmost affability and walked away. Such conduct, based on good sense, would have modified if not obliterated all my theories about his insanity (until perhaps the next outbreak) if I had not heard and seen enough of his treatment of his wife to persuade me that the man was not in his right mind. Only the night before another quarrel had taken place in the

bedroom under mine, not indeed so fierce as the one I have recorded, but bad enough to have shocked me had it been the first in my experience. For a long two hours afterwards I had lain awake striving to conjecture the reasons of these insensate scenes. I conceived that his mother's approaching visit might be at the bottom of the quarrels that had taken place since I had been in the house; but so far as it was possible for me to judge there was positively no reason to be assigned to the constant wrangles that had raged between them ever since a few months after their marriage, but wickedness, a mere mad perversity on his part—a vicious mind unhallowed by one softening memory, finding insane pleasure in goading his wife into a moral condition little superior to his own.

Whether in accordance with her promise to shock me no more with accounts of her misery, or whether because of the hint I had given her, that she made a great mistake in communicating her troubles to strangers, and above all to persons beneath her in position, Mrs. Ransome became very much more reserved after that interview I had had with her in her bedroom. She did not ask me if

I had overheard her second quarrel with her husband. She did not mention his name. Once only she referred to his mother's approaching visit, when she told me that old Mrs. Ransome would occupy the spare bedroom between her husband's and her own. She looked, indeed, when she spoke, as though she had more in her mind to add, but she seemed to recollect, and quickly changed the subject, drumming sharply with her fingers on the table, as though the effort of repression cost her something.

I thought the change a good one, and flattered myself with having contributed to it; but there was a bitter hardness in her reserve that made me doubt the wisdom of the motives which had prompted it. I do not mean to say that one reason of her silence was not her conclusion that, having set me right as regarded her relations with her husband, any further explanations or bewailments might weaken the impression she had produced. But all the same this sudden change in her was curious—this abrupt departure from a profound self-abandonment to grief to a reserve that was frigid in its absence of all reference to the troubles

which were eating up her heart. I was sorry, for her own sake, that she had been so candid with me. I considered that I now beheld her in her natural character, and that her pride, which she professed was dead, was secretly bleeding over my knowledge of her secrets, and particularly over the manner in which I had become acquainted with them.

Mr. Ransome's mother was expected to arrive on the Monday.

On the Sunday evening Mrs. Ransome had gone to church by herself. During her absence Mr. Ransome, who was smoking on the lawn, seeing me pass the open dining-room windows, called to me and said :—

“ My mother arrives to-morrow. Did you know ? ”

“ Yes, sir. ”

“ What room is she to have ? ”

I told him.

“ You will see that it is made comfortable for her. ”

“ Certainly, sir. ”

“ And be careful to let nothing that my wife says interfere with your duty to make my mother feel herself perfectly at home in this house. ”

He said this sternly, in one of those odd gusts of passion which, it seemed a law of his moral being, should disturb him when he was speaking on matters that could furnish no excuse for temper. I answered yes, and left him, thinking that in that very tone I had found the key to the quarrels between him and his wife. *I* might endure such a manner, now and again ; but how would the quick haughty spirit of his wife brook it ? Her answer was bound to be pitched in the same note, and then would come the dissonance, the uproar, the fury.

He had left the lawn before Mrs. Ransome returned from church, but whether he was in the house or striding across the country I could not tell. His actions had no reference to the ordinary standard of behaviour.

I opened the door to Mrs. Ransome, being on the staircase when she rang. She was pale with the heat and tired, but looked a beautiful commanding woman, her bonnet in exquisite taste, her dress a thick blue silk. I thought her mind would take notice of some pathetic irony involved in this visit to church and this return to a home of bad passions and aching trouble.

She entered the dining-room and called my name languidly as I was going. I went to her.

"To-morrow, Miss Ivory, my husband's mother arrives. It is not my intention to live with her while she remains in my house. But do not suppose that I am to be driven from my home by her. I want to consult you. Please sit down. Now, tell me how I am to manage."

She sank into an arm-chair, slowly fanning herself. There was a hard obstinate look on her face despite her languor, and she kept her eyes fixed on me.

"I do not exactly see how you can avoid living with Mrs. Ransome if she occupies this house with you," I answered.

"Very easily. Mrs. Ransome can use the library as we used to call the next room, and take her meals there with her son. We never need meet. She comes to see my husband—not me: and she *shan't* see me."

"But do you consider the embarrassment——"

"I consider myself, no one else," she exclaimed, plying the fan quickly. "I have made up my mind *not* to meet that woman,

and there's an end to it. I shall retain this room for my own use. Meanwhile you will see that the servants just attend to her—no more—give her the same bare attention that she would receive in an hotel. For yourself, Miss Avory, you will take no notice of her, and if she attempts to order you—tell me. I want an excuse to turn her out of the house.”

Had I traced the least lurking softness in the expression of her face, I should not have scrupled to represent to her the deplorable unwisdom of the course she meant to adopt: but I was as effectually silenced by her obstinate, haughty, resolute eyes, by her hard tightly compressed lips, by her slight but most suggestive frown, as if her most passionate command had been addressed to me.

“I hope you thoroughly understand my wishes, Miss Avory?”

“Yes, madam.”

“You know enough to require no further explanation. Indeed, I should pay no compliment to your common sense by supposing that you desired me to explain. I am mistress here, and mean to assert my position. That

is all. If Mr. Ransome is displeased, he can tell his mother to go: if his displeasure is very great, he can go with her. Happen what will, my resolution is taken. I will not sit at the same table with that woman, nor countenance her gross intrusion upon *my* home by the smallest act of civility."

"You know best, madam."

"Yes, I do know best. She shall not have the chance she had last April of exciting more bitterness even than we naturally feel, between Mr. Ransome and me: of championing him against me though he was never so cruelly in the wrong, of maddening me by her atrocious innuendoes, her direct charges, her criminal falsehoods, and then walking to Copsford and telling everybody she knew—even my tradespeople—that I was an evil-hearted woman, that I was not a lady, that my wicked conduct was breaking my husband's heart, and such infamous talk as that. Would you meet such a woman were you in my place?"

"I certainly should not. But I should require certain proofs of her guilt before I condescended to resent her falsehoods."

"I have had proofs. She abused me to

my last housekeeper. She talked to the servants about the suffering her poor Saville endured through my heartless treatment. She will talk to you if you will let her."

"She will not talk long."

"You will take care to strictly carry out my instructions?"

"Certainly."

These were her orders: and now it was evidently to be war to the knife between this unhappy couple. I do not think that she had any clear anticipation of the consequences of her action. It seemed to me that she wanted to push matters to a crisis, taking no thought of what form that crisis might assume, resolute only to bring about a change of which her husband would be burdened with the whole responsibility.

Mr. Ransome remained away from the house all that evening and returned at ten o'clock. Ten minutes after he had arrived Mrs. Ransome's bedroom bell rang. She was evidently acting wisely for once. When I looked down from my window half an hour later her light was out. Perhaps she was reserving her forces for the morrow. Be this as it may, I thought that she had it in her

power to pass as tranquil a time every evening, and for the matter of that, every day too, if she would but hold her tongue and leave him to do all the talking.

Next morning I obeyed her orders about getting the library ready with more alarm than, perhaps, I should at that time have been willing to confess. Every moment I expected Mr. Ransome to drop upon me and ask me what I was about. There was no joke even in the idea of a rencounter with such a man. Of course I should obey Mrs. Ransome, let him countermand her orders as he pleased ; but suppose he told me to leave the house? I should have to go. He was master, view him as I would, and with his disregarded dismissal hanging over my head, my situation would be too intolerable to make it worth my while to keep.

These thoughts greatly flurried me as I superintended the cleaning of the library. The room was a small one, and faced the avenue ; the trees threw their shadows upon its one window and obscured the light. Dark, and commanding no better prospect than the compactly-grouped trunks of the trees, the apartment was sufficiently dreary,

and I could not wonder that it was never used. There were some old oil-paintings against the walls which, in the imperfect light, were scarcely decipherable, appearing indeed no better than streaks of yellow and red upon a black ground. There were no books, and why the room was called the library I could not conjecture, unless it had been used long ago as a library and kept the name.

Mrs. Ransome's folly in forcing her mother-in-law into this room, took deeper significance from contemplation of the darksome chamber. I was very glad when the job of getting it ready was finished. I breathed freely when I closed the door, and had scarcely reached my own room when I heard Mr. Ransome's footsteps in the hall.

I had no idea at what hour the old lady was expected to arrive, but was not kept very long in suspense, for while Mr. Ransome was still at breakfast, Mrs. Ransome summoned me to her bedroom. I crept in a manner that would have convicted me of a most sneaking gait, passed the dining-room where Mr. Ransome was breakfasting,

being, in view of the storm which his mother would bring along with her, honestly afraid to meet him.

Mrs. Ransome was seated before the toilet glass, and Mary was brushing her hair—rich, beautiful hair it was, and fell over the girl's arm like fine black silk with a lustrous blue sheen upon it. I had never seen her look more beautiful. Her noble white neck showed like Parian marble through her muslin dressing jacket, and her small superbly-shaped head was fully disclosed by her hair being down. The curtains had pink linings, and the light, therefore, exactly suited her complexion, the pallor of which, in the clear sunshine, would have appeared almost ghastly from contrast with her brilliant black eyes and her long streaming ebony-coloured hair.

She saw me in the glass, and addressed me without turning her head.

“Oh, Miss Ivory, I forgot to tell you last night that Mrs. Ransome is supposed to arrive here between half-past twelve and one. Be on the look-out for her, please. I mean, be ready to receive her when the door bell rings; then call Susan and tell

her to take Mrs. Ransome to her bedroom—you understand?"

She was fond of putting that question. It seemed as if her passionate resolution and anxiety to carry that resolution out made it difficult for her to suppose that her wishes were exactly intelligible to those she addressed.

"Quite," I replied; "and should she ask for you?"

"Tell her that I am very well—not dead yet, nor even dying," she responded, with a loud satirical laugh, at which Mary tittered and glanced at me, as though inviting me to hearty enjoyment of the scene.

"You would not wish me to make that reply, madam," I said, taking her seriously.

"Oh dear, no! preserve your p's and q's, Miss Ivory, and tell her with all the ironical courtesy you can summon, that the young mistress is not visible."

"I shall obey your instructions literally," I said, meaning to imply the hope that she would not render my duties more ridiculous than her temper made positively necessary.

"I expect you to do so," she replied sharply, turning her face towards me and

wrenching her hair out of the girl's hand by the movement. Then softening her voice instantly and smiling, she added, "remember!"

I knew she referred to my promise to recognise no other authority but hers and answered—

"I do remember, madam, and you may trust me. I am anxious about my instructions simply because I mean to carry them out to the letter."

"Well, those instructions are as you have heard. When she leaves her bedroom she will be shown into the library. If she asks to be taken to the dining-room, tell her that I am there, and that the library is for her use while she chooses to honour us with her presence. As to the drawing-room the door is locked. There is the key."

She drew it from her skirt pocket and held it up, watching my face to see how I would receive her manoeuvre. I merely inclined my head. She knew her business better than I did, and no possible result but irritation could have been produced, by any attempt to reason with her, whilst that obstinate defiant expression lighted up her

eyes, and that faint bitter smile made her mouth hard with obdurate meaning. But foolish as her plans were, she made them, in my opinion, more foolish yet by speaking of them before the housemaid. Had she seen how the girl took her words in, the grin of expectation that widened her mouth, her anxious glances at me lest I should interfere with the thunderous programme her mistress had prepared, and so spoil much delightful sport, Mrs. Ransome might have been satisfied with directing me in the briefest terms, and allowing me, for the rest, to use my judgment.

"Is the library ready?"

"Yes."

"You quite understand that Mrs. Ransome and her son take their meals together in that room? Let Maddox wait upon them. He is more Mr. Ransome's servant than mine. Mary will attend upon me."

"Then two separate trays are to be prepared for every meal while Mrs. Ransome remains here?"

"Of course. Mr. Ransome has choice of either room. It will matter little to me whether he chooses to live with his mother

or his wife. But no earthly power shall induce me to occupy the same room with that woman, to sit at the same table with her. This house is mine, I therefore select the rooms which please me. And should Mrs. Ransome *dare* to complain, tell her that I am willing to pay the rent of a lodging for her at Copsford, where she may have her own way and be as much mistress as she chooses. That will do, Miss Ivory."

I left the room. So sincerely did I deplore the reckless attitude she was about to assume that, had I known of the existence of any friend easy of access, sufficiently privileged to reason with her, I would have hastened to him and begged him, while there was time, to entreat her to alter her resolution, and though for her own sake only, to endure her mother-in-law's visit.

Mr. Ransome lingered in the grounds until eleven o'clock, and then left them, no doubt for Copsford to meet his mother. As the time approached when I should have to receive the old lady, I grew absurdly nervous. Indeed, I considered it unfair to myself that I should submit to execute orders so entirely repugnant to my own feelings, and was

only restrained by selfish considerations from going to Mrs. Ransome and declaring that I was unequal to the duties she had imposed on me.

Mary had evidently been chattering to the other servants, for they were on the alert every time I passed the kitchen, though whenever they saw me they pretended to have an immense deal of work to do which utterly engrossed them from all paltry consideration of the business that was none of theirs.

When it was half-past twelve, I went into the library and stationed myself at the window, whence I commanded a sight of the avenue and could observe the carriage approach. The matter is of no importance, but I ought to have mentioned in my description of the house that it had no stables; the Ransomes did not keep a carriage, but Mr. Ransome I believe jobbed a phaeton at Copsford, which would be brought to Gardenhurst from time to time.

It was a quarter to one when I heard the sound of wheels coming along the avenue. Soon afterwards the bell rang. Maddox went to the door, and I followed him and stood on one side as he threw it open.

An old rumbling "cottage upon wheels," as Sydney Smith used to call the flies of that period, had drawn up, and Mr. Ransome was helping a very little woman to get out of it. So small and fantastic an object I never before saw, and I wondered that Mr. Ransome did not catch her under the arms and swing her into the hall as he would a child. She alighted with great deliberation, and catching sight of Maddox called to him in a shrill voice to take her trunk. Mr. Ransome paid the coachman his fare and came up the steps followed by his mother, at whom I could scarcely look without laughing. That such a fragment of humanity should give Mrs. Ransome trouble seemed inconceivable. As reasonably might Gulliver have been vexed by being flouted by a Lilliputian maid of honour. Her bonnet was large and the feather in it larger; but there was no extravagance in the rest of her costume. One thought of her as a doll, and hardly troubled to speculate on the material and style of her costume; but one might see that she was exquisitely neat—the little bow, the little collar, the little shawl, the little gloves, the little cuffs, and the very

little sandals—she wore her dress short, after a then fast expiring fashion—were all faultless in their adjustment, fit, and aspect. Her eyes were blue and dim, but she did not use glasses ; they had a wide, staring expression in them, and like her son's they travelled nimbly and fell upon you abruptly and appeared to take in minute details by resting on them. Her nose was long and rather handsome, I thought ; but the bones of the face were hard against the skin, and a sad want of fleshiness coupled with a disagreeable whiteness of complexion made her appearance cadaverous.

“Where's my wife, Miss Ivory?” were the first words Mr. Ransome asked me.

I could not remember that Mrs. Ransome had given me any instructions as to the answer I was to make to that question, so I answered, “I don't know, sir,” and turning to the little old lady, said, “Will you let me take you to your bedroom, madam?”

“If you please,” she replied, with hopeful alacrity, and added, “You are the house-keeper, aren't you?”

“Yes,” I said.

“Lead the way. I'll follow.”

Mr. Ransome called Maddox to him and addressed him in a low voice, whilst I pushed through the ante-room that divided the two halls and ascended the stairs with the old lady labouring like a short-legged child behind me. I forgot until I had reached her bedroom that it was part of my programme I should call Susan to attend her upstairs. But I was too flurried to remember such minor matters. However, it gave me an excuse to leave her at once after throwing open her bedroom door, and I was half way down the stairs before she had time to ask me a question.

Mr. Ransome was in the hall, holding the handle of the drawing-room door.

"Miss Ivory, come here, please!" he called out.

"Will you let me send Susan upstairs first, sir? There is nobody with Mrs. Ransome."

"Do you mean my mother?" he exclaimed, twisting the handle of the door angrily and shaking it.

"Yes, sir."

"Why is there nobody with her, then?" he shouted, stamping his foot. "Go and

send one of the girls instantly, and come back to me."

I called to Susan, gave her the requisite directions, and returned to Mr. Ransome. Now that I confronted him, I found my fears gone.

"Where is Mrs. Ransome—my wife?" he asked, frowning savagely and speaking in a fierce voice, suppressed almost to a whisper, but avoiding my eye.

I gave the same answer I had before made—

"I don't know, sir."

"You do know."

"If I did I should tell you," I replied, folding my hands and looking down out of pure disdain.

"Why is this door locked?"

"I did not lock it."

"Who did then?" And without waiting for my answer, he added, "Go and get me the key."

"Mrs. Ransome has the key."

"Ask her for it."

I was about to go upstairs, meaning not to reappear until I had considered whether I had not better pack up my box and leave the house; but he cried out—

"There! there! in the dining-room. See if she's there."

I crossed the hall and turned the handle of the door, but found it locked. Much surprised I pushed with my knee, thinking that the door had stuck with the paint.

Mrs. Ransome's voice, within, exclaimed—"Who is there?"

"I, madam; Miss Ivory."

"I wish to be alone, Miss Ivory."

Mr. Ransome came to the door and struck it with his fist.

"I want the key of the drawing-room!" he called out. She made him no answer.

He struck the door again and his face grew livid. He had no need to strike it a third time, for it flew open and Mrs. Ransome stood on the threshold. Her eyes were in a blaze; her face was white with passion; and there for some moments they remained, confronting each other.

"What do you want?" she said to him.

"You have locked the drawing-room door."

"I have."

"What for? to prevent my mother from entering it?"

"Yes."

"Give me the key."

"I will not."

"Give me the key, you devil!" he repeated through his teeth.

The words were nothing beside the manner in which he spoke them. Had she shot him dead as he stood there, I could have forgiven her. They had a very different effect upon her from what I should have expected. Either her passion was shocked out of her or she mastered it, for she said, coldly and deliberately—

"The library is prepared for Mrs. Ransome's reception. That and her bedroom she may use while she is in my house. The other rooms I keep for myself and my servants. Miss Avory has received my instructions and will see that they are carried out."

Saying which, she shut the door in his face and locked it.

What would he do now?

Having no doubt that he was insane—and I never saw his madness more clearly than in the expression that had entered his face as he struck the door with his fist—I should have believed anybody who had whispered

that there was no action too violent for him to have committed that moment. But my fear was to be disappointed. He stood gloomily staring at me for many moments, though little by little his frown relaxed, the passion went out of his face, and a smile so absolutely indescribable that I feel myself involved in a direct contradiction by calling it a smile, crept about his mouth and set it like a piece of carving.

He held up his finger, and bending his head forward, exclaimed in a mysterious whisper—

“Do you question her madness now?”

As he said this he looked over my head and went forward. I turned and saw his little mother coming quite noiselessly down the staircase. He met her, took her hand, placed it under his arm and led her without a word into the library, the door of which he closed silently.

VII.

The servants had heard the dispute in the hall, and were clustered at the foot of the staircase eagerly waiting for more quarrels.

They dispersed when they saw me, and what was better, had sense enough to judge by my manner that they had better ask me no questions nor annoy me by their gossip.

Two luncheon-trays were to be got ready, as I had told the cook : one for the library and one for the dining-room. It was impossible to tell what new explosion would follow the discovery of this arrangement. Would Mr. Ransome submit to having his mother kept to two rooms in a house full of rooms ? It was idle for his wife to talk of herself as sole mistress, &c., of Gardenhurst. Mr. Ransome was her husband, and head, and could act as he chose : and she must have known this ; and therefore I thought her audacity foolhardy in adopting an attitude which not only repelled sympathy, but which, if Mr. Ransome only chose to act with common resolution, was bound to involve her in a humiliating defeat. Did he really think her mad ? Strange, at all events, that that should be the first remark he made to me when I was expecting a very different outburst, and that he should have said it with a smooth face and as if pity were at the bottom of the remark.

Maddox and Mary took each of them a tray, and some jokes passed between them as they went upstairs. I knew I should be summoned in a moment or two by the occupants of one room or the other, and stood at my door waiting for the return of the servants. Maddox came first. Of course that dangerous chatterbox Mary was with her mistress, inventing lies rather than not have something to gossip about.

"Master wants yer," said the footman, shortly, without looking at me, and walking straight into the kitchen.

I crept up the staircase very timorously, knocked, and entered the library. The sky had grown overcast within the hour, and what with the absence of sunshine and the gloom of the heavy trees upon the window, the atmosphere of the room was no better than a kind of twilight, in which one had to remain some moments before one's eyes could clearly define objects by it.

Little Mrs. Ransome, perched before the tray, was already at work upon the roast chicken. Her son stood behind her, his hands buried in his pockets and his chin lowered upon his breast.

"If it were not for my mother, he exclaimed, almost before I was fairly in the room, "I would have the dining-room door broken open and force your mistress to explain the meaning of this," pointing to the tray. "You must explain, as you are acting under her orders. No hesitation, Miss Avory. By G—, you'll find me dangerous if you trifle with me!"

"I will tell you what I know, sir," I replied in nowise daunted by the mixture of bad taste and idle bravado in his speech. "But first of all you must tell me what you want to hear before I can answer you."

Little Mrs. Ransome ate hungrily, without once looking at me.

"What orders have you received from my wife?"

I told him exactly.

His face grew blacker and blacker as I proceeded, and his hands twitched violently in his trousers' pockets. He wrenched them out, and exclaimed to his mother—

"What will you do? You hear how she means to treat you."

The old lady put her knife and fork down, and pushing her chair from the table, said—

"It is for you to choose. If I leave I complete her triumph. Saville, she wants disciplining. If she were a man I should say she wants flogging."

The blood rushed into my cheeks as I heard her.

"Madam," I exclaimed, "pray consider of whom you are speaking."

"How dare you interrupt me!" she cried shrilly. "Saville, who is this impertinent woman?"

"Whoever I am," I replied, "I do not acknowledge you for a mistress. And I tell you, madam, that I cannot stand by and listen without indignation to the language you apply to your son's wife."

She looked dumbfounded, and turning to Mr. Ransome, cried—

"Order her out of the room! You will not allow your servants to insult me?"

I had caught Mr. Ransome watching me furtively, and with a veritably frightened expression. I looked him full in the face, expecting his command, and meditating a reply, for all my fear had left me, and I felt nothing but utter scorn and dislike for them both. But his gaze wandered, he was silent.

"Mr. Ransome," I exclaimed, "I am in no dread of your mother's temper, nor of your dismissal of me. I am prepared to leave your house at any instant. But whilst I am in it, I will not suffer any unmerited and senseless insults to be heaped upon your wife's head. She is a deeply-wronged woman—your mother knows it. She has been driven by your conduct into a desperate action; but it is Mrs. Ransome's duty to palliate, not to aggravate it—to reconcile you, not to deepen the bitterness that already exists."

"Saville! will you listen to her? will you submit to this?" shrieked the old lady in a horrible fury.

"Hold your tongue, mother!" he exclaimed, savagely. He looked at me, but still I kept my gaze angrily upon him; and he grew restless, uneasy, shrinking in his manner and attitudes.

I noticed this now decidedly. The full significance of it rushed upon me. I became, even as the thought seized me, sensible of my power over him; but whether obtained by the pure force of will which I had unconsciously in my temper thrown

into my language, and which gave steadiness and decision to my gaze, or whether by the mere possession of a pair of eyes which had never struck anybody before as in the smallest degree uncommon either for their beauty or their ugliness, I could not tell. I only knew that he could not look at me, whilst the longer I looked at *him* the more scared grew the expression in his face.

His mother found out the secret in an instant. She glanced from one to the other of us, left her chair, and running to the door, flung it open and ordered me to leave the room.

I did not even look at her.

"Saville !" she half-screamed, "are you master here or not ?"

"Who denies it—do you ?" he answered, fiercely, addressing me.

"No, sir ; but I deny the right of that lady to order me out of the room ; I deny her right to expect the smallest obedience from me ; and I further declare that she is acting a cruel and unwomanly part in seeking to exasperate you against your wife, and in siding with a man like yourself against a weak, defenceless, ill-used lady.

Be assured, sir," I continued, determined to "have at him" now that I had the chance, and taking care not to remove my eyes from his, "that society, sooner or later, avenges such injuries as have been done Mrs. Ransome, your wife. A wife, for her own and her husband's sake, may hide the secret of her misery," I spoke these words with all the significance I could put into them; "but others have eyes and ears to see and hear, and tongues to report; and when I leave this house, I shall consider it a duty I owe to my mistress and myself to relate to the *proper persons* the exact nature of the terrible life you have led Mrs. Ransome, of which I have seen one shocking illustration in the marks of your fingers upon her arm."

"Ah, but how did that happen? She had maddened me, and I grasped her arm while answering her—it was an accident," he exclaimed, while his face grew as pale as his mother's, and the coward's false, forced, vanishing smile twisted his lips, and made his mirthless eyes look wild and haggard.

"She would break his heart if she could!" he mother cried. "Talk of *her* sufferings!

Has she not threatened you, Saville? has she not wished that you would drop dead at her feet? But everybody in Copsford knows her! I took good care that her character should not be misunderstood. The wilful, venomous hussy!"

I glanced at the eager, passionate, crazy-looking little face and hated the woman there and then, hated her for her falsehoods, her vulgar abuse of her daughter-in-law, her low, miserable malice. This was a touch of nature that made my young mistress and I akin. Her determination not to meet this spiteful little creature had all my sympathy now.

Mr. Ransome was staring at me fiercely; but the moment I looked at him his eyes fell and he muttered to himself.

"Sir," I exclaimed, "you have heard the cruel words your mother has made use of towards your wife. Can you suffer a stranger like myself to go forth from this room and say to those I meet, that Mrs. Ransome's character was grossly insulted in the presence of her husband, and that he did not utter one word in her defence?"

"Don't look at me!" he cried, passionately.

"Look at my mother. You are speaking of her—address her!"

"I am addressing you, sir."

He went to his mother and whispered. The action was made extraordinary by the terrified glance he threw at me over his shoulder. She bent her blue eyes, full of malignity, upon me, and said, suppressing as well as she could the shrillness in her voice—

"My son and I wish to be left alone. You are now an intruder, and every moment you stop makes your intrusion the more unpardonable."

This decided me. In the face of this view of my presence I could no longer stop in the room. I went out, closing the door after me, and paused a moment or two outside, considering whether I should go to Mrs. Ransome or to my room. The voices within rose high. I heard him say, "She is a devil! how she looks at me!" And the mother answered, "She cannot harm you. She is your wife's friend and is in league with her to turn me out of the house and humble you." I would not suffer myself to hear more, but walked to the dining-room.

Mrs. Ransome opened the door herself to my knock and exclaimed—

“Oh, is it you, Miss Ivory? Come in.”

Her luncheon was upon the table, but she had not touched it. There was some wine-and-water on a chair near the sofa, and some toilet vinegar. The room was oppressively hot.

“Let me open one of the windows,” I said, and suited the action to the word.

She merely said, “I was afraid they would come in by the lawn. My head aches cruelly. Have you seen his mother?”

“I have just this moment left them both in the next room. Did not you hear us talking?”

“No.”

“I had hoped to do you a service, but Mrs. Ransome was too cunning and left me no excuse to remain with them.”

“What service?”

“Let me first tell you that I have made a discovery. I do not positively declare that I am right in my conclusions—but I believe I am. Mr. Ransome is afraid of me.”

She sank back on the sofa with a faint incredulous smile, which I deserved for put-

ting my theory into such conceited language.

"Pray forgive my manner of expressing myself," I went on: "I do not want you to misunderstand me. I never observed the same behaviour in him before to-day. I haven't the faintest notion where my power lies: but I am as certain as that I am standing here that I have been suddenly gifted with some kind of controlling force which, were I resolute in my exercise of it, would make him tractable to my wishes."

She looked at me inquisitively and said—

"I understand what you mean. The nurses or matrons in asylums are supposed to enjoy your power, is that it? I believe you: but I should not have suspected your influence by looking at you. You once suspected my sanity," she exclaimed, with a smile: "see if I can outstare you."

"I don't like the idea of possessing this power. It suggests a disagreeable species of affinity."

"I would to God I could take it from you!" she said. "But do you not see that his insanity must be gaining strength by bringing him within the reach of such power as you can exert?"

"Yes, I see that, madam. But is it not for the best? Your life is unendurable. The resolution you need to end it will be forced upon you by the madness which will compel you to separate from him."

"Oh! I never think of him. It is my father I dread—his horror of scandal—his misery when he reflects upon the ending of the marriage I was so obstinate upon!—But what was the service you hoped to do me?"

"That I could induce Mr. Ransome to persuade his mother to leave the house."

She shook her head and exclaimed—

"You don't know what a perverse, vile woman she is. They influence each other, and she will persuade him to keep her here until she is tired of stopping. But I *swear* I will not meet her—she shall only use the two rooms I have given her."

"Frankly, madam, I have seen enough of her to make me hate her as cordially as you do. But will you tell me why she is so bitter against you? why she takes pleasure in exciting ill-feeling between you and Mr. Ransome?"

"I cannot explain—I do not understand it. It has been partly the work of time

with her own mad wicked nature to furnish her with motives. It began by her taking her son's part against me, then we had words, and so it crept on. Her hatred of me is so intense that I really believe, were it not for the consequences, she would incite her son to kill me!"

"God forbid!" I exclaimed, with a shudder: "though if I thought that, and were in your place, I would have her turned out of the house neck and crop, and obtain such help as would effectually prevent Mr. Ransome from introducing her again."

She made no answer, but walked to the window and stood there breathing the air, and pressing her hands to her temples. I never felt sorrier for her than I did at that moment. There was something painfully sad in the thought of her great beauty wasting and decaying in loneliness and misery, in her young, ardent nature desolated by evil passions, not one of which, I dared say, but her husband was responsible for.

I was about to entreat her to take some food, feeling persuaded that she had eaten

nothing that day, when she turned sharply round and cried in a bitter voice—

“I wish my husband were dead!” She instantly added, “The grief, the pain, the utter hopelessness he has forced into the two brief years of our marriage no heart but mine can conceive. What I have had to endure—the insult, the neglect, the fierce temper, yes, and the blows—only God has witnessed. Oh, there have been words of his, actions of his I never can forgive him for! There is not under heaven a woman more wronged than I have been. He had my first love—for a long while I strove with my own temper and bore with his gathering, reckless, crazy taunts, until my patience gave way. What is the use of saying he is a madman? He was not mad when I married him; he has never been so mad as not to know how most cruelly to wound me. And have not the mad their sane moments—when moods of tenderness visit them? Why did he marry me? He has told me over and over again that he never loved me. He saw that my father disliked him, and he determined to make me his wife for that reason only. He declares that my humiliation is the only

pleasure he knows. He praised his mother, he thanked her, before me, for going to Copsford and telling the people there every falsehood her wicked heart could imagine. 'Your distinguished father should be told of this,' he said. 'He once informed me that no member of the Kilmain family for generations had ever excited one word of gossip in this district. He's a liar! Phoebe has excited gossip. All Copsford is talking of her and saying what a wretch she is to lead her husband the life of a dog.' Those were his words. When he mentioned my father's name I could have stabbed him. Villain! Coward! Why does not God take his wicked life?"

Her passion was terrible. But the hot blood mounting to her head, racked her unendurably. She groaned and sobbed with dry feverish eyes, and cast herself upon the sofa, clutching her temples as though she would rend them.

I knelt by her side and endeavoured to soothe the pain by pressing my handkerchief, damp with the vinegar, to her forehead, heartily regretting my intrusion on her, since it had brought about no better issue than this explosion of passion. I did not attempt

to speak to her ; but when, after bathing her head for some minutes, I believed the pain in some measure relieved, I left the room, receiving a faint " thank you " from her as I opened the door.

VIII.

Determining not to be made ill by this excitement, and my head (in emulation of Mrs. Ransome's), beginning to ache, I tied a handkerchief under my chin and sallied forth into the grounds to breathe some fresh air and recover my composure, which had been greatly shaken by Mrs. Ransome's outburst.

There was a pleasant breeze blowing from the distant hills over the great open space where the grounds were unprotected. I walked towards the kitchen-gardens, where I should be screened from the house, and paced a long walk where a forest of peas hid me as effectually as the trees down at the bottom could have done.

The under-gardener was at work here weeding some beds. I stopped and had a talk with him. I mention this trifling circumstance because Colonel Kilmain has com-

municated the sequel of this story to me, and for reasons the reader will ascertain in due course I am wishful to recal the first occasion I had of speaking to this man. He comes back to me as a square-built individual with a brown homely face, which struck me as honest enough. I took no particular notice of his appearance. He was very respectful in his manner, answered my questions with alacrity, complained, but with moderation, of the hardness of the times, of the dearness of food, and said that he was keeping company with the upper-gardener's daughter, but hadn't the heart to marry her yet, as it was as much as he could do to support himself on what he earned.

"That shows good sense," said I. "If all working-folks thought as you do, there would be a deal less poverty and trouble among them."

The air had freshened me up, and I returned to the house, but with a real feeling of reluctance and a sincere regret that the inner life of the old building was not more in keeping with the repose and serenity of its exterior, and with the lovely and delightful scenery that lay around it. The breeze

sported with the trees of the avenue, and all on that side of the house the sunshine flickered and the moving shadows seemed to fan the building.

I was no sooner in the hall than the true story of the place was renewed for me by the sounds of voices in the drawing-room. Mr. and Mrs. Ransome were quarrelling furiously ; but they were alone, for as I entered the house I had just caught a glimpse of the little old lady's head vanishing with great velocity round the turn in the hall where the library door was. I had no doubt she had been listening.

I made up my mind to seem deaf and interrupt the quarrel by walking into the room as though I had no idea that anybody but Mrs. Ransome was there.

I turned the handle of the door, making sure they would suppose I had knocked and that they had not heard me, and walked in. The moment I showed myself there was silence. Mrs. Ransome sat on the sofa, one hand to her head, her face scarlet, and her eyes shining with passion. Mr. Ransome stood by the table, leaning upon it with both hands, his body inclined towards her. His

face was very pale, but there was a weird merriment in it, an expression of malicious enjoyment of what he was about, which my hand is powerless to describe.

I stood at the door, feigning embarrassment, but not offering to retire. They both looked at me, and Mr. Ransome stood erect and drew away from the table. I watched him steadily and saw that his eyes fell, that the indescribable expression I have mentioned went out of his face, that his lips moved as though he whispered to himself.

Mrs. Ransome started up and exclaimed, pointing to her husband—

“His mother *shall* not come into this room! Tell him that! Tell him to leave me! My head is driving me crazy. Tell him he is killing me!”

“You hear Mrs. Ransome, sir?” I said, turning upon him.

“She lies! I am not killing her. I insist upon her receiving my mother in this room—I am master here, and my wife shall obey me!” he answered, scowling at me with a look of mingled hatred and fear in his strange faltering eyes.

“ You are not master here !” she shrieked.
“ The house is mine.”

My ramble in the grounds had given me nerve. If ever a lingering doubt of his insanity had disturbed my conjectures, that doubt had now ceased. I could no longer look at him and be ignorant that I was confronting a madman ; though *how* mad he was, my total inexperience of this horrible affliction could not decide. Dealing with aberration of this kind I felt I need preserve in myself no consistency of behaviour. Could I influence him ? If I was to try, I must drop the housekeeper and assume the manner and tone of an equal.

As these thoughts flashed through my mind, I fixed my eyes full upon him and said—

“ Mrs. Ransome speaks the truth. You *are* killing her. You must not stop here.”

“ How dare you——” he began, “ and ceased. I had approached him by a step, never remitting my strong, determined stare. I had forced all my will into my eyes. I was *resolved* to subdue him.

He raised his hand to wave me off : his

glance travelled swiftly from the ground to my eyes—there and back again, there and back again, over and over. I saw him struggling to prevent his rage from evaporating into terror, the signs of which appeared in his face and made him a piteous creature.

Now, by Mrs. Ransome's silence I knew she was watching us. But I could not look at her. I was fighting the man with my eyes, and every instinct warned me not to intermit my resolute gaze for a moment. My own feelings, as I marked my power over him, I can scarcely describe: but I clearly recal a thrill of triumph and an access of new determination with each phase of his gradual subsidence into shrinking, struggling silence and dismay.

Watching him always, I stepped sideways to the door, threw it open and said—

“Mr. Ransome, will you come with me? I wish to speak to you.”

He made no answer, but neither did he move. A sudden fright that I had utterly misjudged myself, seized me. The fear turned me pale, but this was, happily, the only symptom. I kept my eyes fixed on him and stood waiting for him to act.

"Phœbe," he exclaimed, in a passionate whisper, actually slinking round the room to where his wife was, "tell her to go. She makes me ill with her eyes!" He wiped his forehead with his handkerchief, and his glance fled swiftly from my face to the floor, again and again.

Mrs. Ransome walked to the other side of the room. I stepped up to him and said—

"The presence of your mother in this house makes Mrs. Ransome miserable. I take it upon myself to urge you to advise her to leave."

"Do you know whom you are addressing?" he burst out, looking on the ground.

"Well," I answered. "Better than your mother knows you. Meet my eyes. If you want to learn your secret, you will find it there."

He tried to look at me. I remarked the effort: but a weight of lead seemed to keep his gaze bent downwards.

"You know my secret, do you?" he muttered. "Now that you have it, what do you mean to do?"

"Much, for your wife's sake," I replied. "Shall I speak to you before her?"

"No!" he said, hurriedly, looking around him with a perfectly white face. "Where shall I go? We must be alone! I understand you now."

"Will you give me the key of the drawing-room?" I said to Mrs. Ransome.

She drew it from her pocket and handed it to me. She then went to a part of the room behind her husband and made me a gesture, signifying that I should not trust myself with him. I smiled to let her know that I was as free from fear at that moment as ever I was in my life, hastened across the hall, leaving the dining-room door wide open, and turning the lock of the drawing-room door, motioned to Mr. Ransome to come. He followed quickly, gliding along the floor with stealthy, noiseless tread.

The moment he had entered, I shut the door and slipped the latch, determined that his mother should not interrupt me. Had I given myself time to reflect I believe I should have been frightened by my own temerity. But I was excited, eager, resolute on having my way. I never thought of danger, and my very fearlessness immeasur-

ably strengthened the power I found that I had over him.

The window blinds were down. I drew them up and flooded the room with the brilliant afternoon light. He stood near the table: I approached him quite close and said—

“Mr. Ransome, you know I have your secret. But you may repose the fullest confidence in my silence providing you will allow me to dictate actions which will prove as much to your advantage as to your wife’s.”

“She has called me a madman,” he said in a whisper, mysteriously raising his finger: “but she does not believe it, or she would not be so free with the word. Why do you keep your eyes on me? Great God! do you not know they put fire into my blood?”

“For your wife’s sake, Mr. Ransome, you must request your mother to leave this house. But I also advise you to do so for your own sake. Listen to this! Your mother makes your position a dangerous one. Her presence sets the servants talking. Terrible quarrels may happen, the rumours of which will get abroad and invite inquiry

by making people eager to learn the cause. If your secret is found out, you know as well as I do what will happen."

"Oh!" he shrieked: "don't speak it! it is my horror!"

"Think of your wife's forbearance," I continued: "one word from her——"

"Hush!" he whispered. "Why did you draw the blinds up? Light is treacherous. When I think of my secret I like to be in darkness."

"It is your secret," I said, taking no notice of the irritable glances he flung at the windows, "that drives you away from your home, that forces you to take lonely walks, that compels your tongue to say harsh and cruel things to your wife. Is it so?"

"Hush! my wife does not know. She flings her words out wildly and hits the truth by accident, never guessing that she has hit it."

He chuckled and said something to himself under his breath.

"I have power," I continued, "over your secret, and can save you from the penalty it will bring if you will suffer me to advise you. Your mother loves you—but her love

is dangerous. One incautious word from her will lay you open to the servants."

"You are right!" he exclaimed, speaking rapidly. "I was afraid of her when I was engaged to Mrs. Ransome. The Colonel had keen ears, and I felt that he suspected my secret, and I kept mother cautious by watching and interrupting her."

"You must fear her as you feared her then. You are in greater danger now than ever you were. You have turned your wife's love into hatred, and one provoking word from your mother may cause her to write to her father, and beg him to save her from you. You can guess what he would do."

He shrank away from me, twisting his hands. The madhouse, poor miserable wretch, was his terror. That one threat, in the present phase at least of his madness, was a weapon by which it might appear he was to be controlled to any purpose. But only I could use it. He was conscious that I knew his secret, but he believed it was nobody else's, for just the very reason the cunning of insanity would suggest—he had been called mad to his face.

"You may trust me," I said, "if you will let me trust you. I urge you to remove your mother from this house."

"At once?"

"Yes."

"How? There is no coach to Guildford."

"Let her sleep to-night at Copsford. She can take the coach in the morning."

He walked about the room with feverish restlessness. He once looked at me sideways with a scowl, that should have thrown my nerves into disorder, but my triumph had been so easy that I was not to be frightened now.

"Every suggestion I make," I continued, preserving the same inflexible voice and look I had assumed throughout, "will be for your good, and I will offer no suggestion that is impracticable."

"Tell me again what I am to do," he answered, stopping, and holding his head in a listening attitude.

I replied that he must at once request his mother to leave the house. "If she refuses——"

He interrupted me with a furious excla-

mation, and I was glad of the interruption, for though I perceived the necessity, I also felt the inhumanity, of putting the threat that terrified him into words.

I said no more, but went to the door and threw it open, giving him one last look as I went out, and entered the dining-room.

Though there were no spectators of this interview, yet from what Mrs. Ransome had seen of my influence over this unhappy man, she will bear witness to the truth of the above scene, while the sequel will also serve to vindicate my accuracy. I would emphasize my veracity in this particular record, because of the extreme air of improbability it carries with it. I cannot pretend to explain the power I had over him further than the narrative defines it. Nor in reviewing the scene can I account for the security I felt in that power, and the strong persuasion I had that by taking my cue from his tone, and drawing upon my imagination so as to accommodate my reasoning to his moods, I must eventually subdue him to my wishes. Throughout I was actuated only by the strong desire to serve Mrs. Ransome ; and I daresay not a little of the

self-control I exercised on that occasion was owing to the great sympathy I felt for her misery.

She was lying with her forehead pressed against the sofa-bolster. I shut the door and exclaimed—

“Mrs. Ransome will leave us this afternoon.”

She started up and said, “How? has she consented to go?”

I answered her by relating the conversation I have just detailed. She looked at me with amazement, and cried, “Why should he think you only have guessed his secret? For eighteen months I have known that I am the wife of a madman. Over and over again in my passion I have called him mad.”

“He does not believe you mean what you say. But who shall follow the logic of the insane? I cannot conceive what there is in me to frighten him. I should have thought such eyes as yours would have controlled him as mine never could do. But putting these considerations aside for the present, I should like to address you seriously on the subject of your husband. He

is not responsible for his actions. Your personal safety is really dependent on your taking precautions at once to guard against his violence. His insanity has most unquestionably gained ground since I have been in the house. Consider his behaviour just now."

"But what would you have me do, Miss Ivory?"

"You should write to your father, and take his opinion."

"Oh, I *hate* the idea of writing to my father about him," she exclaimed, bitterly. "I have had excuses for doing so long and long ago, but have always turned from the thought with dislike and dread. There is not more danger now than there was eighteen months ago."

"But *can* you continue leading this life?"

"Do not ask me—do not force me to think! I have been supported by a dreamy hope of some chance occurring—of some event happening, to put an end to it all without my father's interference, without even his full knowledge of the unendurable mistake I made in opposing his wishes."

"What change can you expect? Nothing but his death can free you, unless you place him where his actions will be restrained, which I think you ought to do both for his sake and your own."

She did not answer, and I was struck by her silence; because, though in a moment of passion she had, not long before, cried out that she wished him dead, the expression of that wish implied by her silence, now that her temper was cool, made it sinister.

"It is hard to wish him dead," I ventured to say. "His madness must fill him with suffering, we may be sure of that. I told him that his secret, as we phrased it, drove him into his lonely walks, and forced his tongue to offer insult to you. What frightful fancies must sometimes visit him! His horror of a madhouse is shocking. Think, madam, the thought, the dread of it subjects him to a weak woman like me!"

She interrupted me by exclaiming—

"He is a coward and a devil! I *hate* him—and what I have said before I say again—I wish he were dead! Don't seek to justify him to me! Mad as he is, he can calculate

upon the effect his language takes on me ! all his time is occupied in thinking how he can most grossly insult me. He may be a poor afflicted madman to you—but he is a coward and a devil to me !”

“ That makes it all the more necessary,” I replied, “ that you should separate from him.”

“ Oh, it is easy to say it !” she answered, with great excitement in her manner. “ But the first step is the effort, and you don’t know what reasons there are to keep me chained to this life.”

“ One I know to be Colonel Kilmain’s abhorrence of scandal.”

“ That is one ; but you commence the list in the middle. Begin it with my pride.”

I had always known that to be *the* reason : but I would not tell her. Had she not said that she had no pride ?

“ I can appreciate the full force of that objection,” I said.

“ Exclude every shadow of sentiment from the catalogue and make it a compilation of hard, selfish motives—with one exception : I wish to spare my father. Yes ! and that too springs from selfishness, for there

again my pride is at work. I detest the thought of his learning how great was my miserable folly in marrying Mr. Ransome."

"But ask yourself, madam, if your motive for leaving matters as they are, is weighty enough to overbalance the many reasons you have for separating from him."

"Let him separate from me," she said, bitterly. And seeing me about to continue, she exclaimed, "Listen at the door for a moment, Miss Ivory. I want to know what they are doing."

I opened the door quietly, but heard no sound. I walked some paces down the hall and peeped around the corner; the library was empty.

"They are not in the library," I said, returning to Mrs. Ransome. "I will go and find out what they are doing."

So I advanced to the top of the kitchen staircase and called to Mary.

"Where is Mr. Ransome?" I asked, softly.

"I don't know, Miss. Maddox, do you know where Mr. Ransome is?"

"No, I don't," answered the man's surly voice. "Ain't he upstairs with his mamma?"

I was determined to know what he and the old lady meant to do; and went upstairs, but was scarcely on the first landing when I heard their voices in the bedroom. I fancied they were quarrelling, but I could not be sure of this merely on the evidence of the lady's shrill voice. I went into the younger Mrs. Ransome's bedroom to wait, and had hardly pushed the door to, so as to leave it just ajar, when they both came out.

"If you can't walk the distance," I heard him say, "I'll send Maddox for a fly."

"I'll walk it," she answered, fretfully; "I'll not forget what a coward they've made of you."

"Hush! hold your tongue!" he cried, in a fierce whisper. "It's your own fault. You brought the woman upon me by abusing Phœbe. Here take my arm."

They were going downstairs and their voices died out. I waited five minutes and then descended to the hall, where I met Mary.

"Only think, Miss," she exclaimed, grinning broadly; "old Mrs. Ransome has gone away!"

"How do you know?"

"Why, I heard master call to Maddox and tell him to send one of the gardeners with Mrs. Ransome's luggage to the Copsford Arms; and then they went out by the avenue door."

I popped my head into the dining-room and exclaimed—

"Your little visitor has not made a long stay this time, madam. She has just gone away."

"Thank God!" answered Mrs. Ransome. "I have proved myself mistress this time—they both wanted this lesson! I don't think she'll ever trouble Gardenhurst again."

She came into the hall, and looking round her with brilliant eyes, exclaimed, "Oh, what a hot skirmish it has been!" I could hardly forbear smiling. The victory was hers, indeed; but how had she won it?

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